CHAPTER IV

FESTIVALS

The festival, or 'UTSAV' is a major part of the cultural life of the people. Festivals occur frequently throughout each year, bringing delight and joy to all classes of people and compensating for life's hardships. To any inhabitant of Himachal Pradesh there is no better way of reflecting on the cultural heritage than to relive customs through traditionally significant celebrations.

The majority of festivals and fairs in Himachal Pradesh, whether Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim or Tribals are spiritual by nature. Their celebrations are among the most spectaculer and colourful. Besides the well-known and universally observed festivals there are many less heard-of festivals steeped in hundreds of years of custom, whose formalities are still observed in remote valleys and tribal areas.

In Himachal Pradesh there is a festival for every reason and for every season. Many festivals celebrate the various harvests, or simply the bounty of the earth and the life giving properties of sacred rivers. Others commemorate great historical figures and events, or even virtually unknown teachers and priests, while a vast number express devotion to the deities of myriad religions including Hinduism,
Buddhism and animism. But whatever the content of the festival or Utsav, it is certainly a very integral part of the life of the people of Himachal Pradesh.

From the thickly populated towns and cities to the remote villages, the sequence of festivals almost spreads throughout the year and brings people of all castes and classes together. For the less fortunate such celebrations provide a relief from hardship and worry, and for all people the festival is a time when the traditions and age-old customs of their civilization are brought to life. To the onlooker the richness and diversity of the country and the expressiveness of her varied people are embodied in the explosion of zest and colour that is the UTSAV.

The festivals of Himachal Pradesh are educative in nature and the elements of social orientation and religious cultivation are also inherent in them. The local gods and goddesses around whom these fairs are organised have no written records about the festivals origin. The development of their cult is, thus, shrouded in mystery. But, the exposition of their mythology in the monosyllabic racital by the Chelas serve the function of transmitting traditional lore to the lay-folks. These fairs serve the need for social cooperation not only for economic sustenance of the people but for their cultural survival also.
Most of the festivals of Himachal Pradesh are indigenous and are being observed from time immemorial. They have come down from generation to generation and in the process have been enriched. They were modified from time to time but in their absence they have remained unchanged. These are woven around local beliefs, legends, tradition, superstitions and local godlings. They vary from region to region perhaps due to the difficult terrain and lack of communication. Often a fair is more or less a local affair centred around the deity of a local temple. But when the temple is a famous one and the deity enshrined in it has devotees from all over the State, the festival attracts people from all over Himachal Pradesh and even outside.

**RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS**

**NAVARATRAS:**

The days most holy to goddesses Durga are the first nine days of the waxing moon in the month of the Chet or Cheter (March-April) and Asauj (September-October). Navaratras are dedicated to Shakti cult. Shakti is known by such names as Durga, Kali, Bhumi, Maheshwari and Ambika. The Goddess is thought to be the benevolent universal mother and protectress of all living creatures, and is also known as Uma, Devi, or Parvati. There is, however, another
more violent side to her character, which is indicated by such names as Mahishasuramardani or the destroyer of the demons. The divinities Shitla, the goddess of small pox, Mazani and other goddesses of diseases, are manifestation of the same goddess mother. Their shrines are to be found throughout Himachal Pradesh, even to the farthest points in Pangi, Lahaul and Kinnaur. The important places of Devi worship in Himachal Pradesh are Hatkoti in Jubbal, Ambika Devi at Nirmand in Kullu, Chandika Devi at Kothi and Ukha at Nichar in Kinnaur, Bhima Kali in Sarahan, Hidimba in Manali, Tripura Sundri at Nagar in Kullu; Jawalamukhi, Vajreshwari in Kangra, Chintpurni in Una, Lakshna Devi at Brahmaur, Shakti Devi at Chitrari in Chamba, Mirkula Devi at Udaipur in Lahaul and Naina Devi in Bilaspur.

The name most commonly given to the fierce form of Devi is Durga. She was created out of the flames which issued from the mouths of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva and the other gods, specifically to kill demons, in particular the buffalo demon Mahisha, who by practice of austerities had gained the strength to drive the gods out of the celestial kingdom. She was immediately armed by the gods and sent forth against the Asuras. In the ensuing battles, she killed the Daitya Mahisha, Sumbha and Nishumbha and their generals Dhumraksha, Chanda, Mundu and Raktabya, on the Vindhyahills.  

Alarmed at these reverses, one great Daitya king, Durga by name collected a very strong and large army. The Devas feared that their fortune now hung by a slender thread, so they were filled with dismay. But Devi again took the field with a lion ramp. Still no hear cherished the least hope of her success against such strong and enormous odds. Before battle, she inspired her soldiers with her marital spirits so much so that her soldiers saw her as a very goddess of victory incarnate. The battle was the fiercest - Devi won the day after all. The Devas gave her the title of Durga for having slain the most formidable foe Durga. Her worship first began a century later, i.e. about 2700 B.C. It is said that Suratha first started her Puja. That Durga Puja now forms the greatest festival in northern India with the difference that formerly her worship was mental and in the spring season, but now her image is worshipped in Autumn. The famous DURGA SAPTASATI or Devi or CHANDI MAHATMYA of the MARKANDEYA PURANA extolls her exploits and her name is glorified in other Puranas also.

NAVARATRAS are not commonly observed in the rural parts but the eighth day, Durga Ashtami is of great religious significance and every member of the family

keeps a fast and visits the nearest Durga Temple where a fair is held. Those who worshiped the goddess in the form of Shakti, sacrifice a goat while those who worship her as Vashnvi offer flowers, Karaha to her. The women make offerings of parched rice, dry fruits and walnuts which they consider as being more acceptable to the Goddess.\(^3\)

In the urban areas considerable importance is given to Navaratra days. Some persons keep fast throughout the eight or nine days. Sometimes they will light lamp (Jot) and when a Brahman has read the Debi Path will prostrate themselves before the lamp. Sometimes it is customary to distribute rice and sweet meats to un-married girls, and goldsmiths will often close their shops in honour of the day.

It is customary in some parts of the region for worshippers of Devi to sow barley on the first day of the Navaratra and water it and keep a lamp burning by it. On the eighth day it is cut and sacrificial fire (hom) is lit.

Devi is personified as a girl under ten years of age twice a year and offerings are made to her as

\(^3\) Mian Goverdhan Singh: Hatkoti; the Centre of 'Ancient Indian Art and Culture in the Himalaya'. Himalaya Kalpadrum (Shimla), 1(4), 1965, p.131.
if to the goddess on these occasions. Usually forehead mark (Tilak) is applied to such girls and they are served with sweet meats and Halwa (Pudding) Red coloured dupattas are also given to them. Many auspicious ceremonies are performed during Navaratras which are considered to be sacred and falling in favourable Nakshtras. This is all done for the well being of the household concerned.

Himachal Pradesh is bestowed with a large number of temples dedicated to goddess Durga under her different manifestation. During the Chaitra Navaratras and Asauj Navaratras many pilgrims from the Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and other states visit these centres.

Amongst these, Hatkoti in Jubbal, Bhimakali in Sarahan, Naina Devi in Bilaspur, Tarna in Mandi, Brijeshwari Devi, Jawalamukhi, Chamunda in Kangra, Balasundri in Sirmour and Chintpurni in Una districts are well known.

GUGA NAUMI:

In the lower hills of Himachal Pradesh, as in the Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, Guga the serpent

5. H.P.'Shrines may attract more pilgrims'. Indian Express, September, 29, 1989.
demi-god is a popular object of worship, especially in cases of snake bite. Shrines to him are often seen in the villages, the god being shown on horse-back with the images of his Chief followers by his side. He is not strictly speaking a Himalayan god, and it is probable that his cult was introduced by the late Rajput immigrants of the hills from Rajputana. He is not venerated by the Kanets of the upper villages, but in the lower hills he is generally recognised, and certain Rajput classes regard him as their ancestral god. His special followers are the Natha and Jogis in Kangra, Mandi, Bilaspur and Sirmaur districts. Some of them pretend to special skills due to his power in catching snakes and curing their bites. The chief festival of Guga is held on the ninth day of the dark half of the month of Bhadon (September-October) when he is supposed to have disappeared into the ground. On that day, the Natha carry their canopies of cobra hoods, from house to house, singing songs in his honour and begging for alms.

From the day of Raksha/bandhan, the bands of devotees of different castes like Brahmins, Rajputs, and the people of the artisan class move from house to house singing of the heroic exploits and life-story of Guga. The persons leading the procession carries in his hand a Chhari - an iron staff about a metre long, its upper and resembling looking like the hood of a snake. Incense is kept burning. Multicoloured
threads are tied to it. The other person holds a leaf umbrella. Pieces of coloured cloth given by families are tied to it. Others carry a damroo—a small drum. One of them has a thali (platter). The singers narrate the story of Guga. The householders give them grains (about two kilograms) and a rupee or so as offering.

The party of singers sets out after sunrise. On arrival in a house they are seated on mats. First of all the leader of the party gives a summary of the narration in plain language which is a mixture of their own, dialect, Hindi and Punjabi. Thereafter the party begins to sing a portion of the life story of Guga. This goes on for sometime. The audience offers coins to Chhari. In the evening the singers return to their houses and distribute the collection among themselves. This goes on up to the day of Guga Naumi is celebrated in almost every village by every household. People burn incense and offer tributes to Guga. Rot—a large size bread prepared from flour and gur, is offered to Guga as Bhog and thereafter the pieces of the bread are distributed to the people present there.

Chharivaun-ka-mele is also connected with the cult of Guga. Chharian means sticks prepared for the occasion of Guga's birth day. Chhari is a symbol of Guga who is believed to be the king of snakes. It is held on Guga Naumi in the month of Bhadon (September) at Guga Mari—the tomb of Guga in Nahan.
On *Sawan Sankranti* (16th July) a contest is held in the Kalistan temple at Nahan for securing the *Chhari*. Two contesting parties of Jagi Padhas come from Naraingarh tehsil in Haryana. Previously the Gujjars of Nahan tehsil also participated in the contest but now they have discontinued the practice. At the time of offering the *Chhari*, a red cloth is tied to it and then worshipped. The mark of a snake is carved over the stick. After receiving the *Chhari* they first go to the palace and sing *Guga* accompanied by the beating of drums. Then they go from house to house. They receive coins, flour, sugar, oil and vegetables. On the full moon night they bring the *Chhari* back to Kalistan temple. They leave it there and have their food. In the afternoon they carry the stick and go to Chhota Cara Chowk. There they stay for four days. Then they go to Chhota Chowk and remain there for another four days. On *Guga Naumi* they go to *Guga Mari*. There they put the *Chhari* in the *Mari* and worship it. All the people of Sirmaur district who worship Guga in their homes during the year bring their sticks and make offerings to the party. The ceremony gives one assurance that no snake shall bite him for at least one year. Now the local Municipal Committee organises the festival in accordance with the ancient customs and traditions.
Today the festival lacks the personal touch of the past which the people still remember. However, they have become used to the over-crowded official programme.

JAGRA (From Sanskrit Jagrana) i.e. vigil is a rite offered to any village deity. Either he is invited to one's house or it is performed at his temple on a day already fixed when all the people of the community also participate.6

Generally, this rite is held at night in commemoration of Mahasu (Maha-Shiva) god in upper Shimla hills, Kinnaur, Mandi, Kullu and Sirmur regions of the Pradesh in the month of Bhadon (September) on the fourth day of the bright-half moon. One member of each house keeps a fast on that day. In the morning, the temple priest, followed by a procession, carries the images and the vessels, to a neighbouring stream or spring, singing songs. There they bathe them according to their ancient rites. The deity's images are preceded by musicians playing on kettle-drums and trumpets. At the spring, the company of worshippers watch the bathing ceremony from a distance. Thereafter, the water from the spring is sprinkled on the gathering. The images and vessels are then taken back in similar manner to the temple and placed in Purda, except for one small image, which is left all day in the courtyard where subsequent ceremonies are.

performed.

At night that image is also taken inside the shrine. A long pole, cut usually from a pine tree, is planted firmly on the ground. It carries a flag in honour of the deity. Another pole, shorter and thicker, cut of at the junction of many branches is also driven into the earth. The forking branches are lopped at a distance of three feet from the parent stem whilst in between that rough stoves of slates are placed so that the hole forms an effective i. This is called Chira. When darkness falls, the worshippers of either sex, with lighted torches in their hands, dance for some time round the temple and the brazier Chira on which they later fling the blazing faggot. All through the night the fire is fed with branches of pines trees, which flash the flaming message of Mahasu's fame throughout the chain of villages which own his sway across the valleys and along the hills, whilst the men and women spend the night in marly joining together in their rustic dances and time-honoured Birsu songs. This goes on till midnight. After this other dances are held till the sun rises.

The legend woven round the celebration of Jagra, dedicated to the worship of Mahasu is that, that at the end of the Dwapra Yuga when Krishna and the Pandavas disappeared, the demons and evil spirits
wandered over the Uttara Khanda (Northern Zone) devouring the people and plundering towns and villages. The greatest of the demons was Kirmar who used to devour the people of Pabar and Tons valleys. One of the victims of this demon was one Huna Brahmin of Maindarath (on the left bank of Tons river in Jaunsar-Bawar) whose seven sons were killed by the demon while bathing in the river Tons. In the evening Kirtaka, their mother went to the river in search of them where he again tried to molest her. The chaste woman was horrified and she began to pray:

Putter dukh dukhia bhai,
Parbal abala aj,
Satti ko sat jat hai
Rakho Ishwar laj.

"I was distressed at the loss of my sons,
To-day I am a women in another's power,
A chaste women whose chastity is likely to be lost. O God, keep my chastity.

After this she returned home and narrated the whole story to her husband. Later on she and her husband went to Hatkoti (Name of Place) to worship Hateshwari Mata. While he was praying he unsheathed a danger and was about to cut off his head, when the

goddess revealed herself, caught his hand and said:

"I am greatly pleased with your devotion. Go to Kashmir and pray to God and your wish will be fulfilled. Huna left at once and in a few days reached Kashmir. He spent most of his time there in worship. One day consequently Lord Shiva appeared before him and said- "I am greatly pleased with thee, ask for a boon." Hearing this, Huna clasped his hands and said:

"Uttar Khand mcen rakshas base, manukhon ka karte ahar,
Kul Mulk barbad kiya abadi ujar,
Tumhi Ruddar, tumhi Bishnu Nand Gopal,
Dukh hau sur sadhuon ko, mare rakshas tatkal,
Sat puttar mujh das ke nahan gai jab parbhat,
Jab ghat gaye nadi Tons ke jinko kirmar khayo ek sath."

The demons who in the northern region are preying upon the people. They have laid waste the country and the people have fled. Thou art Ruddar (Shiva) thou art Bishnu and Thou art Nand Gopal. The sages and devotees are in distress; pray, kill the demon at once."

"Early in the morning the seven sons of mine, thy slave, went to bathe and when they reached the banks of the river Tons Kirmar ate them up."
The Lord Shiva was pleased and said, "Thy boon shall be granted and all the devils will be killed in a few days". When the lord asked him to go, he gave him some rice, a vessel containing flowers and a lamp and said, 'Oh Rishi, go home and keep they confidence in me. A Shakti (Goddess) will first appear in the garden of Maindarath. Numerous gods will come out of her thimble who will kill the demons. Keep the flower, rice and lamp thy house and perform the customary daily worship of all these." After many days Huna reached home. On the 3rd moon of Bhadra month a Shakti (Goddess) appeared:

Bhumi se upni mata Dee Lari
Than Dee Mata Ko Kongo re Bari

"Mother, Dee Lari appeared from earth. The temple of Deo Mata (was named) the Bari of Kongo."

Math bole mai re agni re gethe,
Botha raji Mahasu hoi suraj re bhekhe.

"On the mother's head burnt a fire of faggots. Mahasu was born with luture like the rays of the sun".

Chhati se marte chakkar chal,
Janama chalda Mata re lal.

"Placing her hand round her breast, the mother brought forth her son Chalda."
Mata Dee Lari no hath kie khare,
Bashak Pabasi dono hath de jhare.
"The mother Lari raised her hands, Bashak and Pabasi both sprang from her two hands".

Chauth men upne Mahasu Char,
Panchmi hui tithi di Deo Kiyalu Banar.
"The four Mahasu were born on fourth and on the fifth were created the gods Kiyalu and Banar".

Sher kalia Kiyalu hoe Bothe re Wazir,
Rome hoe rome do non lakh bir.
"Sheer-Kalia and Kiyalu became the ministers of Botha, nine lakhs of heroes sprang from every hair."

Hath bande pair shir laya janu,
Maindarath Tule da Kirmar damo.
"With clasped hands and feet he placed his head on her knee, Kirmar, the demon in the Maindarth Lake."

Kaththi hoi saina Maindarath ke bag,
Char bhai Mahasu Kurdi re ag.
The armies were arranged in the garden on Maindarath. The four Mahasu brothers were like the fire.

Sabhi jabi, Debte ne binti lai,
Kya deire agya Deo Lari Mai.
"All the gods made a prayer. What are the orders of the goddess Deo Lari Mata?

Jab di agya sri Deo Mai,
Kirmar Keshi rakshas to tum do ghai.

"Then Sri Devi Mai gave orders, you must kill the demons Kirmar and Kesi.

Agya pai Mahasu ki mungar liya hath,
Maha rath par Chalda baithe non lakh saina sath.

"Receiving the orders, the Mahasu took bludgeons in his hands. Chalda sat in the great war chariot at the head of nine lakhs of men."

Pirtham yudh hua Maindarath men, Saina mari apar,
Aise Shib Shankar bhae jo santan Pran adhar.

"The battle was first joined at Mandarath and enemies were slain. It was Shiv Shankar who thus came to save his disciple."

Jab majho, me devat pahunche an,
Singi mare jab dait, hua yudh ghamasan.

"When the devtas reached Majho they killed Singi, the demon and a desperate battle was fought."

From Majho Karmar again fled to Kinari Khandai but was pursued by the deotas."
Khandai jane khe pawa the thao,
Bir bhane the Rajie Khande re lao.

"He took refuge under a rock in the village of Khandai, intending to smite his opponent."

Sath larau deete Kharie khande,
Ghai have rakshas lai lai bande.

"All the Gods attacked with their swords and cut down the demons to pieces."

Sab devan ke deb hai Mahasu Kartar,
Kirmar adi mar ket dur kiya mahi-bhar.

"The Lord Mahasu is the god of all gods. Killing the great Kirmar he has lightened the burden of the world."

After killing Kirmar all the gods assembled at Maindarath. Here Huna further begged that the demon, keshi who had made Hanol his abode and was destroying its people should be killed. Hearing this the god marched with his army in that direction.

Baja jori-bhartha deote ra baja,
Botha Raja Mahasu Hanola khe biraja.

"Joribharth, the music of the gods was played when Botha Raja and Mahasu left for Hanol."

On seeing Mahasu the demon Keshi fled to Masmor Mountain but Chalda and Kiyalu followed him there and killed him.
Kaushi Howe adami paharo re sare,
Kare tek khaumpani kute re mere.

"All the hill people rejoiced. Accept as thy revenue the offerings made out of our Share of the produce."

Sada Kahen, Mahasiva, Mulk tihara,
Sal deo samate ra kute ra kara.

"O Mahasu, we way this land is thine for ever, and we all give thee each year every kind of grain in due season." After killing all the demons Both Mahasu divided the country among the gods and asked them to guard the people against all calamities. The people of these lands will worship their gods.

Raj Sobe deoton ko is tarah banta,
Rajdhani Pabase dena Deban ra danda.

"He divided his state to the gods thus giving the territory with the part of Bilo on the side of Sathi."
"To Pabasi he gave also the country of Shathi which is on the bank of Patwal."

Kailu kotla hu dine kvalue Banar,
Bothe Chalde Mahasu re raj howa sarah Pahar.

"To Kialu and Banar he gave Kalu and Kotla also. And Botha and Chalda Mahasu became rulers of the whole of the hill tract."
All the gods went to their own places. And then Botha Sri Mahasu disappeared.

From the time that Mahasu disappeared, he began to be adored in the Hanol temple.

His place is in the Northern Region. His temple is built on the bank of the river Tons'.

Equally interesting is the following legend of Shirgul in whose memory Jaga and Jagra is held in some parts of Shimla hills and Sirmur areas.

One demon named Asur Agasur of Chawkhat (near Chor peak) used to plunder the subjects of Bhokku, chief of Shaya Shadga. The people invoked divine protection while Bhokru himself was compelled to flee to Kashmir. For twelve years Bhokru and his queen devoted themselves to religious meditation, and then directed by a celestial voice, they returned home and performed the Aswamedha. After some time Bhokru's queen Dudma gave birth to a son who was named Shirgul.
Two years later Chanderswar was born. When the boys were aged 12 and $9\frac{1}{2}$ respectively the Raja went to Haridwar. On his way back he fell sick and died, his queen succumbing to her grief, at his loss. Three days later, Shirgul proceeded to Haridwar. On the way he was struck by the beauty of Chaur Dhar. On his return from Haridwar he decided to live on the peak. One day Shirgul saw Delhi from the peak and then set out for Delhi. The ballads of Shirgul describes his journey like this:

Dili rowae naugre de moogle ae,
Shigra aje Shirgla Dile harae khae.

"The Mughals have reached Delhi. Shirgul come soon, they have plundered the city of Delhi."

Rokhe shooke tookre harae Shirglae Khae,
Chali lona khaieo mare Dili keh jae.

"Shirgul ate dried loaves of bread and thereafter left for Delhi."

Tal katore bago the dhone harae lae,
Khiro re tokne obalne khe lae.

"When he reached there ignited the fire at Tal Katora bag and started cooking Kher."

Pooche Muglae gowe lae ghai.
Norko re chorke lae dhonide pae.
"There the cruel Mughals have started to slaughter the cows. They have also defiled the fire place by throwing the cows blood in it."

Thagre tokene Deva rosho re tane
Mughlo re tabre ghaneo ghane.

"With anger, he threw his cooking vessel on the Mughals and started to beat them."

Dili re bago de dhima dhime hoe,
Akhli Deva Shirgule Mughlo Ghae.

"A desperate battle was fought at Delhi and Shirgul singlehanded killed all the Mughuls."

Thus Shirgul killed all the soldiers and at length the emperor went to see a man of such daring. When the emperor saw him he kissed his feet. So Shirgul forgave him. He was about to return to his place when he heard from Churu that a demon was about to pollute the Chur peak. Shirgul therefore, created a horse, named Shanalwi and mounted on it, set out for Churi Chandani. When he reached at Kalabag, a place north of Churichoti he took some grains of rice and reciting incantations he threw them on the horse's back, thereby turning it into a stone. Shirgul then went out to Churi Choti and there he heard of the demon's doings. Shirgul killed him on the spot. On hearing the death of Asur Agasur his army advanced to attack Shirgul, but he destroyed them all. Then he chose
a spot between Churi Choti and Kala Bag to live there. After some time Shirgul disappeared with Chuhrui, who became known as Chuhrui Bir, while Shirgul was called Shirgula Deota. To this day people celebrate jagra every year and pay their homage to Mahasu and Shirgul in the form of songs and dances.

Fried cakes and porridge are prepared in the courtyard of the temple and offered to the deity first, at the time of worship. The rest is distributed amongst the worshippers and also sent to every household, and is considered an ambrosia.

**DASEHRA OR VIJAYADASHMI:**

The festival of Dasehra in Himachal Pradesh do not differ in any important aspect from the way this is observed in the plains.

The 10th tithi of Asauj-Shukla is called Vijayadashmi. It is elaborately described in Hemandri (on Vrata), Nirnayasindhu, Purusartha-Chintamani, Vrataraja, and Kalatatta-Vivechna, Dharmasindhu. Skanda Purana says: Aparajita should be worshiped by man on the 10th towards the north-east and in the afternoon, when the 10th is mixed with 9th. Aparajita should be worshipped on that day for welfare and victory. The proper time for Vijayadashmi rites is afternoon.

Vijayadashmi is one of the three most auspicious days in the year (the other two being Chaitra-Shukla first tithi and Kartika Shukla 1st). Therefore in India children begin to learn the alphabet on this day; people start new undertakings on this day, even when the moon and the like are not astrologically favourable. And if the king marches against his foes on this tithi (day) when there is Sravananaksatra it is very auspicious and brings to him victory and peace.

Dashehra or Vijayadashmi is a great day for people of all castes, but it is specially a day for the Kshatriyas, the nobles and kings.

On this occasion in the rural areas, twigs of bushes and trees are brought from the forest and arranged in the form of a bush near a temple or in any open space. In the afternoon people assemble there. Wrestling matches are held. In the evening fire is set to this heap of twigs symbolising the burning of Ravan's Lanka.

In the former princely states of Himachal Pradesh, durbars were held on Vijayadashmi (or Dashehra, as it is called) and grand processions with richly prancing horses were taken out on the streets of the

capitals. Before this the effigies of Ravana, Kumbhkarna were prepared and erected in a place where Dasehra was to be celebrated. In the evening the Chief along with the procession used to visit this place. The effigies of the demon king Ravana were set on fire. This practice is still prevalent but the role of the Raja has been taken over by local Naitas or high officials.

During Dasehra days Ramlila celebrations go on for ten days and culminate on the 10th in the burning of a tall hollow paper and wickerwork structure concealing crackers representing Ravana and his hosts.

There are several other local customs and usages such as worship of weapons of war and implements of one's trade or vocation associated with Dasehra or Vijayadashmi.

There are many conjectures about the origin of the Dasehra festival. Some, relying on the usage in some parts of India to offer the gods ears of new corn, of hanging on the doors of the house the ears of green or unripe paddy and of putting in the cap young sprouts of wheat and the like, hold that it is more or less an agricultural festival. Others hold that as about Dasehra the monsoon rains stop, swollen rivers abate and crops are almost ready, it is the most suitable time for marching on an expedition and that therefore the origin is due to military exigencies. But the most
popular belief is that on the day Ramchandra was victorious and he killed the wicked demon king Ravana. This symbolises the victory of truth over evil.

**DIWALI:**

Diwali is the festival of lights held on the *Kartika Amavasya* (Full dark moon light of November) in honour of the goddess of luck and prosperity. This is the new year day of the Hindus who follow the *Vikrami* era. The word Diwali is derived from *Deepavali* (Cluster of lights) and the festival is so called because of the illuminations that form the most important feature of the celebration. In some parts of India effigies of Naraksura or Ravana are made and burnt.

Hindu merchants renew their account books, white wash their houses and shops and generally 'began a new life' on the New Year Day. Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, is worshipped for prosperity in the coming year. Presents are exchanged with relatives and friends. There are also the usual pageants of gaily dressed men, women and children who flock to fairs, temples and public places. Children particularly look forward to this day as the festival of fireworks, crackers and sweetmeats.

In rural Himachal Pradesh on the evening of the festival people assemble in the courtyard of the village temple or village grounds. There they make
a bonfire. They light wood splinter torches and holding them in their hands dance, sing satirical songs till late at night. At some places people recite Ramayan in their local dialect throughout the night.

The Dharmasindhu furnishes a long list of the observations on this pratipad day according to the several PURANAS and digests, viz. worship of Bali, illumination, holiday for the worship of cows and bulls, worship of Goverdhana, the typing of Margapali (Lit protectress of the road), wearing new clothes, dice-play, waving of lights before men by women (whose husbands are alive) and tying up anauspicious garland. In modern times only the worship of Bali, illumination and gambling are observed and the rest have gone into oblivion.

Different legends and traditions are narrated to account the origin of Diwali but the most important is the economic aspect. It appears that when the Aryans left the nomadic life and settled in the river valleys and started agriculture this festival came to

be celebrated. Agriculture became their main occupation. Any auspicious work was started with the performance of Yagyas to the gods. New crop was offered to gods by performing yagya. These occasions were celebrated with great gaitety. Perhaps this is the primitive origin of Diwali and other legends were attached to it later on.\textsuperscript{11}

In later period the legend of Lakshmi-Pujan (Worship of goddess of wealth) was attached to this festival. Legend has it that the Daitya King Bali\textsuperscript{12} conquered all the gods and put them in his prison. Alongwith them Lakshmi was also imprisoned. They prayed to Lord Vishnu for help. Vishnu as Varman Avatar deprived the Daitya King Bali of his kingdom and set the gods and Lakshmi free. Perhaps this is the earliest example of inter racial struggle between the Aryans and non-Aryans. But the story further tells that on the request of Bai, Vaman Avtar blessed him with the boon that on the day he received Bhumi Dan (land in charity) if any one lights the lamp and gives something in charity, Lakshmi would visit his home.

\textsuperscript{11} Brahma Purana 73, Kurma Purana 1, 17
Vamana Purana Chap.77 and 92.
Matsya Purana Chap. 245-246.
Bhavisyottara Purana 140.

\textsuperscript{12} Prabhakar, Vishnu:Diwali, Nav Bharat Times, Varshik Ank, 1975, p.8.
It is also believed that on this day Bali comes up from Patalaloka to Prithvi loka and people worship him.\textsuperscript{13}
In Maharashtra women prepare effigies of Bali either in rice flour or cow-dung, according to grade, worships them and repeat the blessing "May all evil disappear and Raja Balis' empire be restored."

Yet another story connected with Lakshmi worship on this day is that Lakshmi is thought to have existed first as the daughter of the sage Bhrigu and to have taken refuge in the ocean of milk during a period when the gods were exiled from their kingdom as a result of a rishis curse. She was reborn during the churning of milk ocean as Lakshmi, one of the fourteen Ratnas (Precious thing) she emerged on Kartik Purnima from the ocean fully grown and radiant bearing a lotus in her hand. It is on account of this that Lakshmi Punjan is held on this very day.

Another form of Lakshmi Punjan is Kali Pujan. According to Durgasapishati Mahalakshmi is the kinder manifestation of Kali. Mahalakshmi, Mahakali and Mahasaraswati are in reality the economic, physical and intellectual power. For human being all these three
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p.82.
\item \textsuperscript{15} श्री दुर्गासपीठी मोर्चपुर , स. 2008,p.42.
\end{itemize}
powers are essential elements. Legends connected with these throw sufficient light on the Shakti worship by the Aryans. According to the Kalika Purana and Tantra literature, that on Kartika Amavasya (Full dark night of Kartika month) Kali along with thousands of Yoganis appeared. Kalika Purana further mentions that after destroying Rakshas (demons) the Kali became so terrifying that she started to prey on human beings. There was horror everywhere and there was no one to face her. Seeing this Lord Shiva come forward to pacify her. But she did not stop and put her foot on the chest of Shiva. Frightened Shiva closed his eyes. On the other hand when the Kali touched the body of Shiva her anger subdued as the snow melts. Mahakali submerged in Shiva for ever. This was the victory of Sat (Truth) over the Tam (evil). The horror striken human beings breathed a sigh of relief and in happiness they lit lamps which came to be celebrated to this day. Shakti Puja is still celebrated with great enthusiasm in Bengal.

The most popular story in northern India is that after defeating Ravana, Ramachandra and Sita returned to Ayodhya and was crowned as King. But according to Valmiki Ramayana, Ravana was killed on the Chaitra Amavasya (Full dark moon light of Chaitra i.e. March) and Ramachandra reached Ayodhya in the month of Baisakh. It is not known how this event came to be connected
with the Kartika Amavasya. It is also said that the
great King Vikramaditya also selected this day as the
most auspicious for his coronation; hence the
coincidence of the important events.

Yet another story is that Vishnu (Krishna) killed Naraksura (a demon of filth) on Diwali day. It is said that Naraksura was of Pragjyotipur (present western Assam) who was very cruel king. He used to harass women. On seeing this his wife Satyabhama sought the help of Krishna to kill him. He was killed on Chaturdasi (14th waxing moon). To celebrate the
death of a cruel king the people lit lamps and this festival is being celebrated to this day.

Mahavira, the founder of Jain religion and Daya Nand Saraswati, the founder of Arya Samaj were born on Diwali day.

On Diwali day it is considered auspicious to gamble. Puranas say that Shiva gambled with his wife on this day, lost everything and was driven in penury

---

16 a) Vishnu Purana. V, 29. 
b) Bhagavata Purana X (Uttararcha) Chap. 59.

17. त्रिते द्रव्याचाराय विजयोऽका ||
विष्णुष्म गजमयो तर्तीन्त्याऽऽपि विष्णु ||
निर्माणाः सुखाः प्रसार्चव ध्रुवाः प्रज्ज्वलताः ||
तेष्वमनि चौते ब्रम्हाः अद्वैतेऽर्थात्मकः ||
परालोको बृहस्पतिष्ठ तर्तीन्त्याऽऽपि विष्णु ||
to the banks of the Ganges. Kartikaya seeing his father's plight learnt the art of gambling, challenged his mother to a contest, won everything from her and restored his father to his former state of opulence. Ganesha now saw the misery of his mother, learnt the art of gambling and defeated his brother. There were some reverses and domestic troubles, but subsequently there was reconciliation on account of which Shiva declared the day as **AUSPICIOUS FOR GAMBLING** and gave a boon that those who gamble on Diwali remain prosperous throughout the year. In many parts of India people engage on this day in gambling and fortunes are often lost or made on this day.

**Hill Diwali** locally known as Diali or Buri Diali is celebrated exactly one month after the general Diwali on the Amavasya of Mager (December). This is celebrated for three days. On the day of the festival, a bonfire called **Balraj**, is lit in the courtyard of the village temple or on the top of the hills. The villagers especially young men and boys assemble there and twirl the fire-brands called **Mushi** and in some places **Ukla** tied with ropes producing pleasing effect.


of fire work in a dark night. There is a night long vigil and a torchlight procession is taken out in the villages. The people dance and sing satirical songs throughout the night. Scheduled caste people known as Kolis andd Turis or Dhaki sing and dance and put up humorous performances during the night in the houses of those who have been blessd with a son during the preceeding year. In return they get presents.

In Kullu valley Buri Diali is celebrated in a different way. In the evening the people assemble in a place and make a boonfire. They sing Ramayana and Mahabharta in their local dialect and dance round the bonfire. When this goes on, a fight between the gods and the demons is enacted. Gods part is played by the Khasa people and Danavas part by the Kolis. Th Kolis go round the village in a torch-light tattoo. Then they return to the ground and make a mock fight in which the gods are shown as victors.

On the following day of the festival the Kolis bring a long pole called Nag (Snake) and dance. The Khasa attack and strike the pole, symbolising the defeat or killing of the Nag.

The idea behind this is that in the early times when Khasa people penetrated the hills, they faced resistance from the original dwellers Kolis who were defeated by them and the Khasas became owners of their land. Thus Buri Diali is celebrated in memory of this
victory. Diali in Kinnaur is celebrated in a different way. On this day the villagers clean their houses and plaster the walls and floor with cow-dung. At night some splinters of torchwood are placed crossing each other. In the four corners of the plastered place is placed a mixture of Chilgoza (Pinus Gerardiana), walnuts, dried apricots, roasted barley, wheat and chollaie. The torchwood is lit and the mistletoe is offered to the fire. Puja is performed with pancakes, wine and incense. At the time of worship the head of the household or the person performing it chants Deval Patti Vahu and offers some Zonger flowers to the fire. The image of the village deity is taken out in a palanquin and a fire is lit.

In Lahaul the festival of lights is celebrated in a different manner. It is celebrated on the full moon night of Magh (January). In the evening one person from every household takes out torchlight at one point. Every one throws leaves of pine trees in the bonfire in the name of Gophan and Brajeshwari Devi. Then all of them sit round the bonfire. They throw snow balls at one another. This is known as Bhataka. The entire function is called sadhalda (searchlight Gods).
**SHIVRATRI:**

Shivratri is an important religious celebrated in the month of Phalguna (February) throughout Himachal Pradesh. This is the festival for which the people reserve a portion of their savings even at the beginning of the year. Aged people also wait for this festival eagerly. For them this festival is an addition of one more year to their life.

Common belief among the people is that on this day the real existence of Lord Shiva in the form of Linga was established. It was on this occasion that people were joyful and in order to express their happiness they started this festival. Since the hilly areas of the North Western part of India are influenced by the Shaiva mythology, this festival is given great importance even in temple. Most of the gods and godlings are worshipped in the name of Shiva which clearly shows that the local inhabitants were greatly influenced by Shaivik mythology. For the villages the festival is the last great festival of the year in which they would not mind spending liberally irrespective of the fact whether one is rich or poor. The festival is celebrated individually. Although the people save for this festival at the beginning of the year the real preparation starts a month before the festival.
On the fourteenth day of the dark half of lunar month in Phalguna (February) the festival is celebrated. Two days before people dine lavishly. After dinner people who want to sing and dance assemble for two to three hours to do so. While four persons sing in two groups and number of persons between one to three dance individually to the beat of tomburine or drum.

On the festival day all members of the family take bath. Some persons observe fast. The whole day is spent in preparing food in oil or vegetable ghee. The children of the house go to their fields and bring young green plants of barley, twigs of wild cherry Paja and the leaves of artimasia. Then a garland called Chandwa is made by tying sticks together in the form of the spokes of a wheel without the rim and this is hung with leaves of the Paja (Cherry) tree, young barley plants, artimasia and wild oranges if available suspended from the roof by a rope. Below it the floor is plastered with cow-dung and a square or oblong of chess board pattern is made on it with flour lines.

This is called Mandal or Chauk. Then three large Rotis or loaves of 10 to 15 kilogrammes each are prepared and placed in the Mandal. The day itself is observed as fast, but a large quantity of cakes fried in oil or vegetable ghee are cooked. These are called Pakwans. In the evening a small Shiva Linga is made
of Cowdung and an image of Parvati of cooked rice. These too are placed in the Mandal. At night the people worship the images and feast on the Pakwans. They sit by the side of Mandal throughout the night singing hill songs in praise of Lord Shiva and dancing every now and then. About 4 in the morning the master for the house removes all the eatables from the Mandal. The images are taken away and thrown either in a river or in the wheat or barley fields. Chandwa also called Lata is untied and hung up from a corner of the house roof.

The family priest receives one of the big Rotis and the people of the house eat the rest. Some of the Pakwans are put into a Kilda (Conical shaped basket) and carried round from the household, to all relatives and married daughters. He sometimes has to travel as far as 30 kilometres on this errand. The remaining Pakwans lasts with the household for several days.

In Chamba and in the Kangra valley too, the people observe fast and in the evening take non-cereal food. The children play a significant role on the day of Shivratri in as much as they form themselves into small groups, collect small branches of two bushes called Karangora and Paja and go from door to door to fix them in the doors of each house. The significance of this peculiar act, according to popular
belief, is to keep evil spirit and witches at bay during the coming year. For this service the children are often rewarded with foodgrains. While setting the bushes on the doors, the children keep on uttering an incantation in the form of a couplet which means 'The doors have been decked with thorny bush and wild cherry and, therefore, oh witch run away to the peaks'.

For the Scheduled Castes especially Badis (Carpenters) it is the greatest festival of the year. They celebrate it for two or three days. Sometime they sacrifice a goat to their beloved Shiva. They sing songs in praise of Shiva and dance throughout the night.

The songs sung on this occasion have been collected from Chamba and Shimla hills and are quoted below for ready reference:-

JAL THAL DHARNI GURUAE NIARE, NAZ GURU AVATARE
NAHI THI DHARATI, NAHI THI AKASH, NAHI THY MERO KAMLASH
NAHI THIAE PON, NAHI THIAE PANI, TAN THIAE GURU NIARAE
NAHI THIAE CHANDER, NAHI THIAE SURAJ, TAN THIAE GURU NIARAE
NAHI THIAE TARA, NAHI THIAE BHANO TAN THIAE GURU NIARAE
BUDH TAN GUAIE MARAE NAZ GURU NAE GUGLAIRI DHUNDUKHAI
GUGLAIIRI DHUNI SAI, DHUNDHI GIRSAM KARAI
SAION DHUNI RAJAE BHASM KARAI, ANGALE MALI MALI LAI,
ANGAE MALI MALI MALUNI KARAI, TIS MALUNI RI MUST BANAI.
"In the beginning of universe there was no earth, no sky, no water, no air and there was no sun and no moon. Only there was Shiva, body smeared with ashes and sitting before burning faggot."

"Shiva created sky and studied it with Sun moon and stars. He also created sheep, goats, cows, buffaloes, birds and lastly males and females."

"Chander te suraj upar nila gagan basae
Tara te bhiano upaie se nilac gagan basae
Pirthi uaie bholaie swami nae rachna lai
Rat te dharie upaie rachna rachana lai
Bhairian te bakrian upaie rachna rachana lai
Gawain te mahian upaie rachna rachana lai
Chiron te pakheron upaie rachna rachana lai
Nar te madina upaie rachna rachana lai

"Shiva created sky and studied it with Sun moon and stars. He also created sheep, goats, cows, buffaloes, birds and lastly males and females."

"Bejan manukh sansar na basda
Manukh upan laya
Mati ra manukj banaya
Sath doa hath upaie
Masae ri jeebh luaie
Bhare munkha hungtara
Tain basda sansar
Abae basaia sansar
Shiv mera basaia kali dhara"
"Without human being there is no world. He then created him from the earth and gave him two hands. He gave him flesh, tongue and then the man roared. Now the world is inhabited by human being and Shiva himself started to live in the hills (Himalaya)."

SAINI AO PARVI BILAE, MANGO SAINIA SONSAE NILAE.

ABAE KINDAE NACHOO MARAE SAINIA, PAURAE NACHAE JAU RE DALIAE.

CHORAE NO JAU RI DALI SAINA

ABAE KINDAE NACHOO MARAE SAINIA PAURAL NACHAE GIAON RI DALI

CHORAE NA GIAON RI DALI KHULA NACHAE MARAE SAINIA

"Saini (Shiva) has come on the other side. He wants pancakes. He is also fond of dancing and ask where to dance? Oh my Saini (Shiva) dance in barley field, but do not uproot the barley plant. He again ask where to dance? Dance in wheat field but do not uproot wheat plants. Oh my Saini (Shiva) dance freely where ever you like to".

KAIZE MAHINAЕ JAGRA NARAINA
KAIZE MAHINAЕ SHIVARATRI
JATHAE MAHINAЕ JOGRA NARAINA
MAGH PHAGAN SHIVARATRI
CHHARE NA RIGROO ZARIGROO
CHHARE NA PARTO BHORIA
MERAЕ BILAE PAWNAE CHAIN
AAE APOO JATA DHARIA
ENO POCHHNA RONSI BIRO
"Narain's jagra is celebrated in the month of Jaisth (May-June) and Shivaratri is celebrated in the month of Magh-Phagun (February-March) Ransi Vir says that "O Shiva I have collected enough of Ghee, oil, wheat flour and rice for Shivratri festival. You come".20

In some parts of India this festival is known as Mahashivratri. As the name implies it has to do with Lord Shiva—the Maheshwara of the Hindu Trinity. He is known variously Mehadeva, Ishwara, Parameshwara, Tarakeshwara, Jambukeshwara, Shrikantaeshwara. He is also called Bholenath, Bhutnath, Shankar, Shambhu and Panchvaktra. He has 100 names and it is said that Hindus mutter his name in a hundred ways.

Shiva is a member of Hindu Trinity. The other two are Brahma and Vishnu. But the fact is that if we dig down to the rock bottom, this Hindu trinity will be found to be not there really but only one

Maheshwara. There is a legend that way back in the Cimmerian darkness of ancient history—in fact, at the close of one Yuga when Vishnu was resting from his labours of submerging the world under a deluge of waters, a light suddenly seemed to shine before his closed eyes: whereupon he opened them and found to his consternation, a being standing before him, a being who was almost as majestic as himself. This mystery has got to be cleared at any cost", thinks he, and straightway interrogates his caller as to who he is, what the purpose of his visit may be, and so on: to which the other replies: "I am the Lord of all, I shall be happy to know, in my turn, who you are". On hearing this, and watching the calm assurance of Brahma, Vishnu was flummoxed not a little and rejoined. "Not so fast, my dear friend. I am the creator of the whole universe and I am the Lord of all. Be pleased to abate our pretensions: just a wee bit: and above everything else, show respect where respect is due." Brahma lost patience at this. Then, by rotation, as it were, Vishnu also become a trifle heated and overbearing, and, as happens in such cases, words led to more words, and these to more still; until a battle royal, or, rather, a battle celestial, between the two, about the question, "who is the Creator of the universe and Lord of All," was on the point of being precipitated.

Just at the moment when matters were about to reach a crisis, the attention of the combatants was
diverted by a strange phenomenon. A huge and resplendent pillar of fire, without, apparently, any apex whatever, and equally apparently, tapering to no visible bottom, took up its position between them and they would be fighters were so lost in awe and admiration of this that they both were compelled to agree to an armed truce, as it were, a sort of cease-fire, in modern parlance, for the once-pending, that is to say, as investigation into this affair. According to the articles of that truce, Brahma in the shape of a swan, was to fly up and up till he reached the top of the Pyramidal structure and Vishnu, in the guise of a boar, was to burrow his way into the depth till he could overtake the nethermost part of the same. When Brahma had been ascending for an inordinate length of time and had not yet arrived within measurable distance of his quest, he described a flower approaching him from a tremendous height and on eagerly inquiring from it how much further he should proceed in order to come level with the top of the column, it gave answer:

"Desist from your project, whoever you may be, I have been falling down now for aeons from the head of Shiva and still I am only here. This column is none other than Lord Shiva Himself; and its apex you a never reach."

Brahma then returned to the base of operations; and, simultaneously, Vishnu also came unto the surface
from his excavating efforts, with a similar tale of failure written on his brow. One thing then, was certain. Who ever, as between the two (that is as between Vishnu and Brahma) might be the greater, there was one who was greater than either; and, coming to this sensible conclusion, both of them then and there began worshipping this column of fire that had no top and no bottom. Pleased, with their worship, Shiva manifested himself through that fiery pillar and put them wise as regards the ultimate mystery. He told them that neither of them the creator of the Universe, that title belonged to Him; that He was the Overlord of all, and that they themselves owed their existence to Him; He having created Brahma from his right side and Vishnu from his left, He then foretold that in future Brahma would be born from the naval of Vishnu and that he himself would manifest in His own form of Shiva. So, what does it come to? The Trimurti are not really, three, but only one—that is Shiva Himself: the One from whom everything else takes origin. And it is on Shivaratri that Shiva appears to Brahma and Vishnu again in the form of that celestial column of fire a column in the shape of Lingam, and from which indeed, Shiva has come to be known also as Lingodbhavamurti. Shivaratri is thus a very auspicious day.

The Garuida Purana-I, 124, Skanda Purana-I, 1.33, Padma Purana-VI 240, Agni Purana 193 contain the Mahatmya of Shivratri on the 14th of dark half of Magha. Though some detail differ, in all these the main outlines are the same.

All these scriptures praise Shivratri highly when after observing a fast on that day, Shiva is worshipped with Bilva leaves and Jagara for the whole night is observed, Shiva saves the man from hell and bestows enjoyment of happiness and moksha and the man becomes like Shiva himself.22 There is a saying that A thousand Ekadashis are equal to half a Shivratri.

The story that illustrates this extremely exaggerated praise of Shivaratri in the Guruda Purana23 seems to be the older of the three and therefore it is briefly set out here. There was a king of Nishada named Sundarasenaka on Mount Abu, who went out to a forest for hunting with his dog. He bagged no animal and being oppressed by hunger and thirst he remained awake the whole night on the bank of a tank in a thickest of trees. Underneath of Bilva tree there was Shivalinga and in an effort to keep his body at ease he threw down leaves of the bilva tree which fell on


23. Ibid. P.226.
the top of the linga without his knowing it. In order to put down dust he (took water from the tank and) splashed it so that it fell on the linga through inadvertence which he took from the linga by falling on his knees before this linga. In this way he unconsciously bathed the linga, touched it, worshipped it (with bilva leaves) and kept awake the whole night. In the morning he came back to his house and partook of food given by his wife. When he died in course of time he was seized by the myrmindons of Yama, when Shiva's attendents fought with them and liberated him and he became a sinless attendant of Shiva together with the dog. In this way the collected merit without knowing it, if a person does with full knowledge (what the nisada did without knowing) the merit is inexhaustible.24

The story in the Skanda Purana25 is more elaborate. There, it is a wicked Kirta named Chanda who killed fish by catching them in his nets and killed also many animals and birds. He had wife who matched him in cruelty. Thus passed many years. One day he ascended a bilva tree taking water in a quiver desirous of killing a wild boar and passed the whole night without sleep keeping a watch and cast down many bilva leaves which fell on a linga at the bottom of the bilva

24. Garuda Purana 1.124.11 पुराण कफ्प लूणणप्रमाण ।

tree. He also rinsed his mouth with water from the quiver, that fell on the linga. In this way he worshipped Shiva in all ways, viz. he bathed the linga with water, he worshipped linga with numberless bilva leaves and he kept awake the whole night and was without food that day. He alighted from the tree and began, after reaching the tank to catch fish. Because he did not return home that night, his wife went without food and water and passed that night in anxiety. In the morning she came to that forest with some food for her husband and seeing her husband on the other side of the river, she placed the food on the river bank and began to cross the river. They both bathed in the river, but before the Kirata could take the food a dog came there and ate all the food. When the wife wanted to kill the dog the Kirata whose heart was softened persuaded his wife to desist from killing the dog. By this time it was noon (on amavasya) and Shiva attendents came there to take both the husband and wife as he had worshipped (though unknowingly) the linga and the both had fasted on 14th. The Kirata and his wife reached Shivalaka.

It is said that Shivaratri originated from a legend of an accidental fast and vigil of a hunter who on account of this became a lover of animals and a saint of Shiva. The following is the story of this conversion.26

26. Thomas, P. Epies, Myths and Legends of India, Bombay, N.D. P.142.
An uncouth hunter named Lubdhaka was arrested by his creditors and confined in a temple of Shiva. There he heard the devotees chanting the name of Shiva and wondered what it meant. In the evening he was released by a devotee who paid off the debt on his behalf. On his regaining freedom the hunter went straight to the forest to seek game and hide himself in the foliage of a Bel tree, (the leaves of this tree are sacred to Shiva) under which was hidden a Linga. The hunter while clearing the foliage happened to drop some leaves on the Linga, an act of great merit. He also repeated, by way of diversion, 'Shiva' in the manner the devotees did in the temple of Shiva where he had been detained by his creditors. The fellow did not understand what it meant: all the same it added to his merit.

By night fall there came to the tank near the tree on which he remained hidden, a doe big with young. He drew his bow and took aim when the doe saw him and prayed him to spare her life. She told him that another doe was following her and he could kill her, if he would not agree to that, she would go home, deliver her young and give it to her friends and return to be killed. She also told him that she was an Apsara, who on account of her neglect to dance before the idol of Shiva had been cursed to become a doe and live with an Asura who had been turned into black buck. The hunter, by virtue of his repeating
the name of Shiva, had by now become half a lover of animals and he made the doe swear that she would return and let her go.

Lubdhaka sat on the Bel tree repeating the name of Shiva. He had been starving throughout the day and evening. By midnight when he felt the fiercest pangs of hunger, there came another doe. She was restless and apparently seeking her mate. He drew his bow when the doe saw him and begged him to leave her to find her mate, after which, she promised to return to be killed. In spite of his hunger and wasted day, Lubdhaka let her go.

Presently came a black buck seeking his mate. The hunter aiming his arrow at him, the buck requested him to be left to find his mate. The hunter let him also go.

The first doe went home and delivered her young. The second doe and the black buck had conjugal happiness. After this, the black buck asked the doe to remain at home, an offered to go himself to the hunter to be killed. The doe would not permit him to be killed alone. So all the three went to the hunter and quarrelled among themselves for precedence in death.

The sins of the hunter, in the meantime, had been expiated by the vigil and the repetition of the name of Shiva, an a realization of the evil of killing game for meat dawned upon him. He preached a sermon
to the deer and let them go. At this moment messengers of Shiva came with a celestial car and the hunter was bodily transported to Shivaloka.

The Tithitatta, a treatise on vrata holds that a fast is the principal thing in Shivaratri and relies on the words Shankara. On that tithi (Shivaratri) I am not so pleased with (of the linga) nor with clothes (offered to the linga) nor with incense nor by worship nor with the offering of flowers as I am pleased by the fast. On the other hand, Hemadri and Madhava hold that Shivaratri means fast, Worship and Jagarana and all the three are apprehended as principal and quote passages from the Skanda Purana Nagarakhandha in support. 'The man who observes a fast on Shivaratri for twelve years and who keeps awake (in dance and music) before me the whole night would reach heaven. That man, who worship Shiva and performs Jagara on the 14th would not thereafter take milk at mothers' breast
(i.e. would not born again); the ishada unknowingly worshipped a self existent linga observing a fast and Jagara became free from sin and attained the position of the attendent of Shiva.

The proper time for Shivaratri Vrata is night since as stated in the Skanda Purana "goblins, the Shaktis and Shiva (who wields the trident) move about at night and therefore these are to be worshipped at the time on Chaturdasi'. The Skanda Purana provides 'A fast should be observed on that Chaturdasi of the dark half that is joined to nisitha (i.e. that exists at that time); that tithi is the best and leads to companionship with Shiva'.

A brief description of how Shivaratri-vrata was performed in ancient time may be gathered from Garuda Purana I, 124, 11-23. Medieval period literature such

30. अतएव शिवरात्रिकल्यां रष्यराष्ट्रिकल्यां यरस्यम स्थापत्तम शन्दपुराण: ।
   निषिद्धम ब्रम्हाण्य गंगान शंक्यमुंकमुक्त: । जतस्तत्वादि
   चकृशिया" सत्यानि भक्ते ।

31. निषिद्धता यदृ तु कुष्णापकेश चकृशियाः । उपोजः सा
   चिन्वेत्: श्रद्धा शिखः शिखः युः कोषः । शन्दपुराणः

1.1.33.82
as Tithitattva, Kalatattvavivechana, Purusarthachintamani, Dharmasindhu provide an elaborate description of the procedure of Shivaratri-vrata.

In modern times very few, if at all, go through the procedure prescribed even in the Dharmasindhu. A fast is observed and Shiva is worshipped and people may listen to stories of Shiva's exploits. Common people in some parts drink a beverage called bhang prepared by pouring water on crushed hemp leaves with the addition of almonds, rose leaves, opium seeds etc. It is supposed to be dear to Shankara. In many temples of Shiva, water is made to drip on the linga incessantly. At places fairs are held in Shiva temples on river banks and thousands of people come ever from distant places to attend them.

BHUNDA:

The last but not least of the most interesting indigenous festivals are Bhunda, Shant, Kaika and Bhoj. They are the Kumbha festivals of the hill people. Like the Kumbha of Haridwar or Prayag, they are held through the millennia every 12 years or when enough money etc. has been saved. Bhunda is a festival of

Brahmins, Shant is celebrated by Rajputs and Bhoj is observed by Kolis. The other castes also contribute in each and kind to make the festival a success.

Bhunda has been described variously. To the general masses it is a festival. To some it is a fair. Yet to others it is a Jag or Yajna or sacrificial festival. Yajna was a Vedic rite. In the era of Rishis there were three kinds of sacrifice—the Narmodi, Gaumedi and Ashvamedi or the sacrifices of man, kine and horse. These great sacrifices were performed by any one who had subdued the whole world, e.g. the Pandava performed the Horse Sacrifice. All the Rishis of renown used to assemble at the sacrifice, and at the end of it they used to slaughter the man, or animal, calling on the deotas' name and burning the flesh. Then the bones were collected, and their prayers had such efficacy that the man or animal was restored to life. But after their era, goats and sheep began to be sacrificed, and instead of killing a man, he was lowered on a rope, leaving it to chance whether he was killed or not. The Bhunda festival is the old Narmodi Jag and the customs and rites are the same. Some say that Bhuunda is a corruption of Bhandar or temple

34. Ibid.
treasure house. Others believe it is a derived from Bhandara the free kitchen run for devotees.

The Bhunda festival is connected with the worship of Parshurama and some people attach it to the cult of Kali, the Goddess. The worship of Parshurama is said to have been first established in the hills at five places: Kao and Mamel in Mandi, Nirmand in Kullu and Nirath and Dattnagar in upper Shimla hills. The legend concerning Parshurama worship although clouded in ridiculous fable, is not altogether unworthy of note. The legend goes that Renuka, supposedly the very incarnation of virtue, was happily married to Jamadgni. One day while bathing in the river her attention was caught by Chitranad, a Gandharva passerby, and his beauty lingered in her mind. This lapse enraged her husband who ordered his sons to cut off her head. While Rumanvan, Sushan and others refused, Parshurama carried out the order. Pleased with this Jamadgni asked his son to ask for a boon.

Parshurama sought the restoration to life of his mother Renuka after performing various acts of filial obedience. However, being regarded with universal detestation for slaying her who had given him birth, he expiated his offence by giving lands to Brahmins, among which were five village on the Satluj, namely Kae, Mamel, Dattnagar, Nirath and Nirmand. At the last place he presented the Brahmins with a goddess named Ambika and as he regarded her his special divinity he instructed the priests to hold Jag (Yajna) in her honour every three years, and it has, therefore been an immemorial custom in Nirmand to celebrate this festival. At an interval of every twelve years is the most celebrated Jag called Bhundas. Three years after comes Bundajee; Three years after that Butpoor; and after another three years comes Shant.

After establishing these above mentioned centres of Parshurama worship, the Parsuama Brahmins formed branches of the cult, called Athari, Shingla, Shaneri, Larsa and Dansa all in Rampur Bushahr and introduced the Bhunda. Later on the rite was extended to any place where a Parshurama Brahmin took up his abode, and came to be celebrated in honour of other deities besides Parshurama. The other important places are: Basherah, Devthi, Manjheeli, Kharan, Sholi, Dalgaon,}

38. Ibid.
Sarahan all in Rampur Bushahr and Brahl in Jubbal.\textsuperscript{41} The ceremony is also held in western Garhwal,\textsuperscript{42} where it is known as Beda Rat, Basta, Badwar or Barat. There is no fixed period for its celebration.

Some people tell a different tale about the origins of the Bhunda festivals. It is believed that in the early period of history this Himalayan region was settled by Kelarian people. Then in the third millennium B.C. a more powerful people from the North-west entered the racial areas of the Himalayas. They were of the Aryan origin and came to be known as Khasha. When they came there they subjugated and subdued the aborigines and established their colonies in the hills.\textsuperscript{43} They turned Nag, Kol and Kirat land into Khasha land. In order to celebrate their victory over these people they started the Bhunda festival. The main constituents of the festival are a long rope which signifies Naga (Serplant) and the Beda is supposed to be remnant of the pre Aryan inhabitants of the region whom the Khashas had subdued. The main part of the ceremony is the sliding down of the Beda on the rope from the top of the cliff to its base. It is an acrobatic feat. Past events show that when the

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., Jubbal State, p.44.
\item\textsuperscript{42} Moorcraft, Wm. Travels in the Himalayan Provinces of Hindustan.....London, 1841, Vol.1, p.17.
\item\textsuperscript{43} Thakur, Laxman, 'Human Sacrifice(Bhunda) in the Western Himalayas, 'in- Punjab, History Conference, 17th Session, 8.10.1982, Preceedings, P.32.
\end{itemize}
Beda could not keep his balance on the sliding wheel he fell down from the rope and died on the spot. During the Bhunda of 1856 AD the wheel stuck in the rope and to aid the Beda's descent the people tightened the rope till it broke, the Beda was killed. In 1874 AD at Nirmand the man was killed when the rope broke.

Perhaps such happenings in ancient times made the people call it a Narmeh Yajna or Bhunda. They think that this is an undoubted survival of the ancient custom of human sacrifice. No detailed account has ever have been given in the literary an archaeological sources pertaining to this region to the extent and manner to which the practice prevailed. The theory put forward is that the cult of domestic hearth which existed in many ancient Indo-European communities gave rise to sacrifices in primitive times. The main purpose of sacrifice was to gratify Gods and secure boons from them for success in war, progeny, increasing cattle and long life on a quid pro quo basis. E.Westermark says that the practice of human sacrifices was based on the idea of

46. Ibid. P.30.
47. Basham, A.L. The Wonder that was India. N.Y.1963, P.241.
the substitution of a victim for another individual whose life was in danger, which of course at times led to the offering of animals instead of man.

The earliest reference to human offering in the *Rigveda*. The *Purusha-Sukta* does not describe an actual human sacrifices, but merely preserve, in all probability, the memory of it, as it was performed in pre-historic times, because the *Sunahsepa* hymns of the *Rigveda* are not exactly related to the *Sunahsepa* legend of the *Aitareya Brahmana* which is probably reminiscent of human sacrifice in pre-historic times.

The *Brahmanas* record, as an ancient practice no longer current, the slaying of a man during the building rite in order to secure the permanence of the structure. The *Puranas* and *Tantras* also contain some references to another rite requiring the immolation of a human victim. It was a *Narabali* to the goddess Chandika. The offering of human blood to Kali is referred to in the *Kalika Purana*.

Now the question arises whether Bhunda is really a *Narmedh Yajna*? Was a human being actually sacrificed?

The death of the Bodas in 1856 and 1879 in the Bhundas of Nirmand made some British writers call it Human sacrifice ceremony. According to them it was not improbable that in the Bhunda the rope slide was first designed as a more human variation of the original practice of throwing the victim down a ravine. But in former days although the man was given a chance to survive, it was considered that he should be killed. Lately unpleasant consequences to those who had charge of the operations led to genuine efforts to save the man. If the slope was very steep, bundles of grass were tied to the rope to check the speed of the run, and a buffer of wool, cotton, straw or shawls was always provided at the lower end. It is said that with these precautions, and if the man was really securely lashed to the wooden saddle, the only risk he ran was that of the rope breaking, as it did at Nirmand in 1874. But there was also a tendency on the part of fanatical persons, who wished to see the ride carried out in its pristine entirety, to attach covertly an open knife to the middle of the rope, in order that it should be served as the slide passed over the knife.

Judging from the steps that are taken to ensure the survival of the Beda (in Kullu Beda is called Jiyaee), it would appear that the Bhunda is not strictly a Yajna where a human being is actually sacrificed. The death of the Beda or Jiyaee or breaking the rope have always been considered inauspicious. In that event another Yajna
has to be performed. This happened in Nirmand in 1961 AD when the blautar snapped when stretched between the two posts.\textsuperscript{52} The blame for this was laid squarely on the door of the Boda who was accused for carelessness in plaiting it. Immediately thereafter there were persistent demands by the laity and deities for another Yajna without delay. But another Bhunda so seen after could not be easily undertaken as it entailed much expenditure privation for the people. Therefore everybody hoped for the success of the Beda for only then would the God be satisfied and the village prosper. It is a bad omen if the Beda fails and there is much rejoicing if he succeeds.\textsuperscript{53}

The Bhunda is held every twelve years or so at certain places as mentioned above in Shimla hills and Kullu. The chief of these appears to be Nirmand\textsuperscript{54} in Kullu, a large village close to Rampur Bushahr in the upper Satluj Valley. Nirmand is mentioned as Kashi of the mountains. The name is, however known to Sanskrit Scholars from the 7th Century copper plate of Parshurama temple edited by Dr. Fleet in Gupta inscription.\textsuperscript{55} M.L.H.

\textsuperscript{52} Kashyap, P.C. P.33.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.P.
\textsuperscript{54} Simla Hill States, 1911. P.30
\textsuperscript{55} Corpus Inscription India (Calcutta, 1888)Vol.III, P.286, Plate XLIV.
Shuttleworth I.C.S. who was Commissioner of Kullu Sub-Division also found two inscription in Devanagar and Sharda on a metal mask of Mujuni Devi, wife of an unknown Raja, Hemaprakash. The inscription belongs to 9th or 10th century A.D. Dr.A.H.Francke has also described some of Nirmand's many striking religious edifices, of which Parshurama's and Devi Ambikas temples are in the pent roof style with walls of timber and loose stone, and the rest of he shikhara type of the North Indian Plains.

North of the Satluj throughout Kullu save perhaps at Manikaran and Sultanpur, Brahmanistic influence is week or non-existent. But Nirmand is an isolated and outlying Brahmn stronghold where Khasa and Kolis, though they have representation on the managing committee of the temples and are cultivators of the temple lands, count for little. The Brahmans who are divided into five gotras each with its own temple, appear to be a colony from the plans. The Atharvaveda is their chief study as the copper-plate inscription indicates. Their Mahatmya relates that Parshurama the son of Jamadagni settled the best of the twice born (i.e. Brahmans) in Nirmand in order to perform a sacrifice every twelfth year for worship of Devi Ambika.


The record available in the dhol bahi record book off Parshurama temple and other accounts\(^{59}\) show that in the 19th century the celebration were held in 1808, 1820, 1832, 1844, 1856, 1868, 1880 and 1892. In the 20th Century it has so far been celebrated only in 1904, 1918, 1932, 1961 an 1981.

Bhunda is the terminal of the cycle of triennial Yajnas. The first Yajna in the series is called Bhadoji, the next one is Bhadpur which is followed by Shant. These three Yajnas are in the honour of Ambika, while Bhunda is in popular mind dedicated to Parshurama. In actual rituals however Parshurama does not figure much, neither in the Sankalpa of the Yajna in his name, nor does the parmahuti mantra of the havan make any mention of him.

There are conflicting versions as to the dates on which the Bhunda has to take place at Nirmand. One version says it is held immediately after the Kumbh at Haridwar. According to another it synchronises with the Prayaga Kumbh, and yet a third view is that it is performed immediately after its conclusion at Bala, near Banjar in Beas Basin.

\(^{59}\) Harcourt, A.F.P. P.97. Shuttleworth, H.L.H.
These are more coincidences. There is an entirely different and elaborate process to determine the dates for Bhunda, depending on season, crop prospects, resource availability and of course auspicious timings. The dates, day and timings that matter most relate to opening the havan kund, Kund ghawadno, Parshurama's coming out of his cave (temple basement), Parshurama baharo nikhdon, rope sliding, joyacepodro and closing the havan kund, hoondno.

According to Bela Dev, a leading astrologer of the village other dates are also meticulously calculated, and these include the day to fix the calendar of events itself, dhyaro hairma, cutting grass for blauter, the sliding rope, and trees for fuel, milling of flour and rice and issuing invitations to regional deotas and theris.

The dates are provisionally determined much in advance to give the temple authorities sufficient time for preparation. Dhyare hairna function puts a formal seal of approval by the elders of all the castes and communities.

Bhunda in this respect may perhaps be the only ritual which is truly a community venture. Every caste and every section of the community has a role traditionally assigned to it. Brahmans however have a predominant role on the ritual side. Representatives
of each caste gather in Mai-a-kharo (Paved compound in front of the Parshurama temple) for the calendar fixing ceremony. The temple Pujari greets them and applies tilak to all irrespective of caste, the astrologer announces the dates, day and timings of the events. All those present get druba (turf grass leaves) to mark the successful conclusion of the function and a token of the good wishes for the success of the main ceremony.

If the Yajna is held within the prescribed period of 12 years, no deota or goor (oracles) comes into the picture at all. But if this period is extended the goors of Dharoya Deo and Matri Naga in particular persuade the villagers to perform the Yajna. In the event of unusual delay they might insist on holding the ceremony within a specified period on pain of serious consequences including failure of rains, destruction of crops or even outbreak of an epidemic and loss of life and property.

After learning that rope sliding is required, villagers vow before the deota (deity) to perform it. At the same time, their troubles are alleviated, but they must fulfil the vow or face worse punishment. Then they approach Beda to perform the feat. Bedas are reputed to be devotee of Mahadeo (Shiva). The Beda and his family travel from village to village dancing, singing, announcing their intention to slide. Thus the main ceremony revolves round the Beda.
The first major event after the dhyaro hairna is opening the kund. The kund enclosure, with beautiful carved wooden pillars and panels, fronts the main door of the Parshurama cave. The square kund is about a metre deep and wide. Closed it has a thick, large circular stone covering over it. At the time of ceremony the Mehtas (nobles of the area) and Sunars (Goldsmith) lift this stone and place it aside. Then the Sunars clean this pit which is called Nabhi Kund. It is washed and pasted with cowdung and made ready to receive the sacred fire. This fire has to be brought from a particular household of Kretu Purohits. The daily havan is performed by three Purohits a Swance, a Kreshtu and a Jathraru.

While the Swances conduct the havan according to Yajurved, Durga Saptshati and other Saktak procedure dedicated to Mahishasuramardini, the Kreshtu book of havan is titled Brahmr Ishwar-Samvad-Agni Karya Patal. The Samvad echoes the vedic worship of Agni.60 The daily sacrifice is conducted by burning Ghee, barley, rice and fruit.

The next event is the collection of Mooni grass for the blautar, the sliding rope. On a predetermined auspicious day at least one member of each family goes

60.. Kashyap, P.C. P.32. Op cit.
to the forest to cut the moonj grass (Audupuja angustifolius). The grass is brought ceremonially and deposited with the Beda, who has been chosen for sliding. While plaiting the rope the Beda spends the time fasting and praying. He only takes fruits and milk.

During the night the rope is kept for safety in a hut meant for the purpose and care must be taken to prevent an unclean animal from touching it, such pollution necessitating the sacrifice of a goat.

The Beda keeps a cat at temple cost to ward off rats. The rope approximately 400 metres long and ten to twelve centimetres thick when completed, is kept in Parshurama's temple for safety. If anybody defiles it by stopping over to, even inadvertently, he is fined and must sacrifice a goat.

In certain cases a new rope must be plaited provided sufficient time and grass are available. The rope becomes an object of veneration and assumes the attributes of divinity.

The third important event is sending messengers, mostly Brahmins to the neighbouring deities and other Brahman colonies formally informing them of the Bhunda dates and seeking their participation. This is termed Chhap. According to a Chadi song, the participants whose presence is essential are the Brahmans and deities of the other four sthans, Kao, Mamel, Nirath and Dattnagar, four theris - Ladsa, Dendsa, Shinowa and Shanor, the four Chambu deotas of Dharopa, Deogi, Randal and Khasholi village, and sacred book of Rawin, a village near Sarahan in Rampur-Bushahr, the Swanoo Purohits, temple musicians playing on drum, Karmal, nagara, bhanda and the office bearers of the Parshurama temple.

By this time the provisions needed for the Yajna would have been stored. All guests attending it are fed free. The quantity of grains, ghee and number of goats or rams for the guests are fixed as huk (right).

Till the abolition of maufi all expenses were met out of temple revenues. After its abolition funds are raised by the villagers through contributions in cash and kind.

Depending on the auspicious moment Parshurama is taken out of the cave generally at night and is kept in the upper storey of the temple building for public darshan (glimpses). This is normally two to three days before the arrival of the guests. Here Parshurama is
represented by a three faced silver mask and is known as Kala Kama Parshurama. The mask of Parshurama is brought out by a barefooted Brahman and two other Brahmans and two Sunars. Before entering the cave they are given Panchratna, the five valuable administered to a Hindu before death. This is because the cave is believed to be full of poisonous snakes. While the leader fetches the Parshurama mask, one of his companies carries Parshurama's Kumbh the great water vessel. Others bring out any object they may lay their hands on in the room. In the year 1918 Bhunda a very beautiful inscribed ashtadhatu mask of Majuni Devi was brought out.62

On the first day of the Bhunda the visiting Goddlings and their Kalashas are welcomed at a ceremony called Chhamorchhani. Some distance away from the temple, musicians and one or two temple functionaries receive the guest deotas.

The second day is that of Shikhpher, in which all deities participate. The goor (oracle) of Dharopa Deo follows a man who has been blackened with a paste of soot. The man perhaps symbolises the evil spirit and is driven out of the village to ward off evil, calamity and epidemics. This is meant to keep off evil spirit.

It also attempt to appease Joginis and to secure life and property and ensure prosperity for the villagers. Sacrifices are also made at selected points.

Next comes Jal Pujan, Water worship, one of the most significant events of Bhunda. This ceremony takes place either on Shikhpher day or that proceeding or following, depending on the star.

Jal Pujan has twin objective, firstly to replenish the Parshurama Kumbh with fresh water and secondly to extend public applause to Garhi Suhagins (Chaste married women of the village) for their up right conduct, fidelity and virtues. Kumbh is filled from the water of bcili (water spring). It is an elaborate ceremony.

The ceremony that attracts most notice, rope sliding, is hold the next day. This spectacular ceremony is called Jiyaee Pondo. The Beda who has been chosen for the slide and plaited the rope has an early morning bath. After some time, he along with members of his family is taken in procession to the havan kund.

He is clad in a single garment, a Chabagla a loose cloak. He has a dari (red string) round his neck and carries a blue cotton umbrella. Behind him comes the blunter rope, carefully and reverentially borne by about fifty to sixty Khashas. At the Kund he stands outside the enclosure and prays. He then moves out, but before the procession starts a goat is sacrificed.
To the accompaniment of all the musical talent available, the procession then sets off to the sliding spot. The rope is stretched clear of obstacles between two posts, one at the top of the cliff and the other at the bottom of the slope and is carefully fastened.

A narrow wooden saddle, called ghori (horse), with a deep groove on the underside is made by carpenters and placed on the rope. It is secured by strings or boards to the rope so that it does not bounce off and yet slides freely. The saddle is tied by a cord to the anchoring post at the upper and of the incline. After the Jiyaee has satisfied himself, he is again back to the havan kund and formally dedicated at a solemn ceremony. Panjratna is put in his mouth, and funeral music is played. He is carried out of the temple by the Kardar (member of the temple management) on his back.

Outside the main entrance of the temple the Jiyaee again set off in procession as before and goes to the higher of the two posts. His relations and the bulk of the spectators remain at the lower post. He performs Puja before he mounts the saddle on the rope.

Simultaneously the palanquin of Parshurama is so placed as to give him a clear view of the Jiyaee. When the Jiyaee has been seen by Parshurama astride the rope a blanket is wrapped around him, he is taken off the rope and a white goat is substituted. Heavy bags of
sand are fastened to its legs and are secured to its body to keep the balance.

At a signal from the officiating purohit the string is snapped, the goat comes sliding down. At the lower end where the gradient of the rope decreases because of its own weight, blankets, shawl and sacks are wrapped for about ten metres to check the speed of the run and break the saddle and the goat.

The moment the goat comes to a half it is taken off the rope. The Jiyaee meantime descends to the lower post and is hold to have successfully performed the slide. Amid wild shouts of 'Parshurama ki jai', and 'Devi Ambika Ki Jai' he is lifted high and arried by the Brahmans on their shoulders to the shana. He become a deity and is entitled to whatever he may desire as an offering. The spectators further make voluntary offerings to him. He then leads the Nati dance, a rare privilege, and dances two and half round. With this ends for him the months-long austerities amid rejoicings, music, dance and valuable presents. The rope is cut into pieces and distributd among the temples and the different communities of the village and other participants in the Yajna.

The fourth is the bidai (departing) day when the visiting Kalshas and deotas depart for their homes. The temple musician and functionaries are then off at the point where they were received on their arrival.
On the appointed auspicious day, the *havan kund* is closed with the massive stone lid covering the fire, ash and other articles of sacrifice. This is known as *Kund Hoodno*. Between the *bidai* and the *kund Hoodno* Parshurama returns to his *samadhi* and *tapasya*. His mask, the water vessel and other articles taken out of the cave are returned to their places. The massive outer door of the cave is shut, belted and securely locked till another *Bhunda*.

Rope sliding in some ways resembles a Tibetan ceremony held annually in front of the Potala in Lhasa in which men could slide down a rope at great peril to life and limb to secure benefits for the Dalai Lama. On this basis it has been suggested by some European writers that rope sliding originated in Tibet.

Most travel between Tibet and India was by Tibetan traders and hordes rather than by Indians. Indians went up to the pilgrim centres Kailash/Mansarover only while rope sliding in Tibet is limited to Lhasa, a long way east of Kailash. This practice is on the other hand fairly widespread in the lower Himalayas in the Satluj-Ghaggar basin. It is, therefore, more likely that the ceremony moved from India to Tibet than in the reverse direction.

---

Rope sliding is thus essentially an Indian ceremony. If one looks at the ritual activities of rope walkers, acrobats, singers, dancers who go by the name Boda or Natt elsewhere in the country, he will find points of similarity in form which suggests a continuous range of performances to which rope sliding may be related. The famous hook-swinging ceremony of south India, while different in many respects, bears formal similarities to rope sliding in the suspension of the performer at dangerous heights from a slope and also in the whirling around of the performer on a pivoted horizontal piece stop a pole to honour the gods.64

The primary meaning of the ceremony seems to have been the propitiation of a deity by the performance of a spectacular, expensive and dangerous feat in his honour which had the effect of focusing attention on him to the fullest degree. The purpose of the rope sliding ceremony is the same as that of a vast range of ceremonies to alleviate or avoid difficulties, especially sterility, illness and crop failure. The meaning of the ceremony revolve around the belief that supernatural beings are responsible for most human difficulties and that many of these difficulties are caused by deities as a means of displaying their anger or disappointment at being neglected or not being properly worshipped.

64. KKashyap, P.C. P.34. Op cit.
There are various interpretations about the purpose of Bhunda. It is said to be a Yajna in penitence for matricide by Parshurama and sacrifice in honour of Parshurama. It is also said to be homage to his preceptor Lord Shiva. Bhunda is in fact Parshurama's Yajna and he is the host, though acting through his proxy the Kardar (members of temple management).

Bhunda is thus a Narmodh in which the death of Boda is not intended. This is in keeping with the ancient traditions where the sacrificed man or animal was revived after the performance.

Bhunda on one hand fulfilled the object of the Yajna by dedication the Boda to god and on the other by taking all precautions to enable him to survive signified the revival ritual. The preparation for the Boda's death, putting Panjratna in his mouth and funeral music which precedes the sliding are therefore only an insurance against the unhappy possibility of the Boda's death, to assure him satisfactory place hereafter and to protect these who have sent him on his journey from his potential angry spirit, bhoot, rather than evidence of intent to sacrifice.

Besides, the survival of the Boda in no way detracts from the success of Bhunda. He mounts the rope and slides down an so far as rites are concerned he has served the purpose the moment the samkalpa has been read and he has been dedicated to god. What is more, his
survival ensures the availability of a Beda for an other Bhunda ceremonies as no tribe or community can ever afford the loss of one man almost every year in one village or other if the Boda is meant to die.

Bhunda though technically organised by the Parshurama temple, is sponsored and managed by the village at large. All are expected to participate and all participants reap the benefits. Participants and consequent benefits extend to the sthans and therios in fact the entire region. From the village itself, in addition to those mentioned in the welcome song, participation of all other castes is also essential.

Bhunda thus has an important function, underlining the inter dependence of the villagers and their common ties with the locality. The temple, in consultation with elders of all castes and communities, decides the ceremony and fixes the calendar of events.

At the time of Bhunda factional splits, traditional animosities among clan and caste lines are suppressed and all cooperate or the common good. In this ceremony one gets besides a glimpse of the process of assimilation and integration of the diverse social and racial elements which went into the making of Hindu society.
Kaika: In the upper Beas Valley covering Kullu and Mandi regions, a ceremony called Kaika is held every five years. It bears some resemblance to the Boda sacrifice in the Satluj and Pabar basins. But the dates of the ceremony here too are determined by the goor (oracle) or Cheia of the local deity. A caste like Bodas, named Nar play the main role in the ceremony. Nar families are mainly found in Kullu and Mandi.

In Kullu, Kaika is performed on the 1st Bhandon (middle of August). The intervals are not fixed as they are in the case of trionnial Kaika at Shirar, but depend on the will of the god declared by goor. Large gatherings attend the Kaika and the Nar is obtained from Manikaran. In the early decades of the century a women of that village was also consecrated to the god and remained unmarried though she was not denied cohabitation with men. As at other Kaika ceremonies the Nar is supposed to die and to be brought to life again: he grants dispensation for the sins of the people and the ceremony perhaps is a survival of human sacrifice like the Bhunda at Nirmand.

67. Ibid. P.72.
The festival is held at various places in Kullu and at three temples in Mandi. Its primary motive is the transference of sins or baneful influences to a human scape-goat, and thus to allow both gods and men to carry on their affairs under the most favourable auspices. Since the ceremonies illustrate various beliefs of the hill-people, here is reproduced the greater part of an account of the festival, written for a more general description of Himalayan religion than can be here given. It is only necessary to remark that the principles illustrated in the Kaika are by no means exceptional.

In Mandi the best known god in whose name the Kaika is held is Narain of Hureng who lives in the deep valley below the Bhubu pass. Like most of the Narains of the hills, he is a snake god. Next to Kamru Nag he is the most popular weather deity of the area and the large water-fall on the Palampur road about 16 Kms. from Mandi is the work of his hands. This he made to water his cattle when he was wandering about in the guise of a cow-herd, and although it is some 35 Kms. from his shrine, he holds occasional festivals there. Associated with him is a Devi or goddess who accompanies him wherever he goes. She has no ark nor images, her standard

---

being an iron road, but she has a diviner of her own who always "plays" with the mouth-piece of Narain himself, the two acting together, since neither the god nor his companion can exercise power without the assistance of the other. The main temple of the god, situated at Hurang, a small hamlet lying at the bottom of a deep and narrow gorge, is an unpretentious building now in bad repair, its chief feature being the figures of serpents carved on the walls which help to establish the nature of the presiding deity. About thirty metres to the east of the temple is a small shrine sacred to Narain and containing a linga of stone. Immediately behind it is a dense forest of deodar, oak, walnut and other trees, the home of bears and monkeys which take heavy toll of the peasants crops. The undergrowth is very thick for no tree or bush is ever cut, nor may man or beast enter the forest which is sacred to the god whose spirit often rests therein. In front of the main temple is a flag pole of deodar surmounted by a trident, and this is removed at every celebration of of the festival, which is hold regularly every fifth year towards the end of July or in the first few days of August. The chief actor in it is the Nar, so called from Narain the god, but now used almost as a caste-name to designate the few families in Mandi and Kullu who furnish efficiencies at the Kaika.
Originally the Nars were of the Kamet community and they are still higher than Kolis, but the unsavoury character of their functions has invested them with uncanny attributes and they are taboo by the higher castes. The Nar, who attends at Hurang, belongs to a family once resident in the territory of the god, but a few generations ago it migrated to another portion of the area about 45 Kms. distant. He comes to the temple a few days before the festival begins, being entertained at the expense of the community. He fasts on the day preceding the observance of the main rites and after rigorous ablution is dressed in a new suit of clothes. He is accompanied by his wife, or if he is unmarried, by a woman of the so called Nar caste, who is likewise provided with a new dress. Early in the morning, a tabornacle is erected close to the temple, four poles of deodar being placed at each corner and an swning of cloth stretched over the top. A sacred square is marked out on the ground inside it and small lamps and heaps of different grains placed in the several compartments.

The remission of sins begins clearly in the morning. The Nar sits on the ground on the edge of the tabornacle, while one of the temple priests offers the sacrifice of burnt offering close by. The companion of the Nar, or Naran, as she is called, dance and sings around her husband interchanging remarks with the worshippers, which, like the songs, are often of a
grossly indecent character. She has a brass stray on her head on which are several small lamps which kept burning so long as the ceremony proceeds.

The Nar has by his side a basket containing barley and leaves of the magical bekhal shrub. First the god is cleansed and, apart from the ordinary mischances which impair the power of Himalayan deities, Narain once committed so grievous a sin that he was smitten with leprosy. Only one finger, however, was affected and the periodical cleaning at the Kaika prevents the malady from spreading. His litter, with the diviners and other servants in attendance, is brought before the Nar and any disabilities from which the god may be suffering are recited by his mouth piece. An offering of a rupee or two is made and grain thrown over the Nar who pronounces his formula of purification. Then the god's servants are cleansed and after them the members of the congregation who press round the Nar waiting for absolution. The suppliants come forward one by one, each with a coin and a few grains of barley in his hand, the first being given to the Nar as an offering and the grain thrown over him. At the same time, the suppliant describes the sin or ill-fortune from which he desires release and casts it on the scape-goat as he throws the barley. One may be haunted by the spirit of an ancestor; a second may be afflicted by illness; the cattle of a third may have been overshadowed by a witch; a fourth may have omitted some act of worship to his
god; a fifth may be under the onmity of an evil spirit; while a sixth may have suffered some bereavement, a sign that a malign influence is at work.

The individual ills are numberless, and when a person may be conscious of no specific peril or affliction there are always the intangible powers of evil which however unseen around every human being are awaiting the chance to bring misfortune. And so the remitter of sins sometimes absolves the worshipper from faults in general and sometimes from a definite incubus; but whichever he does, he always throws leaves of the bekhal and grains of barley as he pronounces the absolution.

The ceremony occupies at least several hours, and on its conclusion the Nar is taken to the small shrine of the god on the edge of the forest. The diviners and office-bearers of the god and of the devi his partner accompany him, while these members of the congregation who are labouring under the afflatus—often a considerable number—fellow close behind. The male worshippers of high caste remain at a short distance away and behind them again are the women and people of low caste who are not allowed to approach beyond a certain limit. Having arrived at the shrine, the pujari of the god, who has not eaten food that day and who is wearing a new suit downed after special ablutions, stands within
a magic circle marked in flour and from there worships the god, waiving a censer of incense round the stone image. He sprinkles leaves and holy water on the Nar who presently falls down as dead. He is laid on a bier and a funeral shroud wrapped round him while the musicians play the music for the dead. Four men carry the "corpse" down in front of the main temple passing through the crowd which is eagerly awaiting its appearance. As the procession moves slowly on, the people throw pieces of grass and twigs on the body with the invocation that it may assume their ills. The priests and attendants keep throwing handfuls of flour into the air as obligation to Koli and her attendant spirits who are thronging above the bier ready to seize the victim. When the circuit of the village is complete, the procession returns to the shrine in front of which the bier is laid on the ground. The diviners of the god and goddess, as also the medium of other deities who may be present, as also the mediums of other deities who may be present as guests, sit round it in a circle, all being still under the influence of their spirits. Incantations are recited and prayers said to the gods to restore the Nar to life. After half an hour or so, he shows signs of returning consciousness and presently rises from the dead amid the congratulations of the assembly. His resurrection marks the end of the festival. He and the Naran are presently allowed to depart, taking with them the recognised
prerequisites of the roles they have assumed the suits of clothes, the owning of the tabernacle, the offerings made to the scapegoat and other gifts of ghee and grain from the store house of the god.

At the similar festival in honour of Phungni Devi certain mystical rites form a very interesting part of the ceremonies. This goddess has her temple not many kilometres away from the home of Narain, whose sister she is supposed to be. She is a manifestation of Kali and the people identify her with Parmeshri, the great goddess, one of whose many habitations is on the snowy peak of the same name which stands out pre-eminent in the range of mountains separating Kullu from Chamba District. Her home is visible for many kilometres and the Gujars, the nomadic herdsmen of the hills, pay adoration to her when they bring their herds for the summer grazing to the higher slopes. Looking towards the peak they bow several times and then immolate a goat in her honour.

In Kullu the word Phungni appears to be another name for the Jogni, the hand-maiden of Kali, found on every mountain summit, and is used to denote a special form of worship celebrated in her name. The peasants climb to a hill-top, where they sacrifice a goat, sheep or lamb to the Jogni, and after worshipping her paint a large flat stone with different colours, laying on it the liver of the slaughtered victim.
The Phungni Devi with whom we are concerned is the family deity of the village and is worshipped as the goddess of the Alpine pastures, being entitled in this attribute to the first-born of the flock which browse on her preserves. Close to the Mandi-Kullu border, at a high altitude, is a mountain lake sacred to her. The water, so the people say; is as clear as crystal, its surface unbrok'n even by a twig or blade of grass; for the birds, the servants of the Devi, sweep down to the water and bear away in their beaks the flotsam of the lake. Her main temple is in a hamlet about 2,000 metres in altitude which nestles with its terraced cultivation amongst forests of blue pine and deodar. Her worshippers are under several restrictions. They may not wear shoes of leather nor smoke tobacco, and even her drummers are men of high caste, no man of low caste being allowed to approach her shrine or litter. Even at the Kaika festival the village monials have to watch the celebrations from the far side of a ravine. These take place at irregular intervals according to the means of the people. The Nar belongs to the same group of families as supplies the scape-goat at Hurang and comes to the temple with the Naran, his companion, a few days before the festival begins. He is treated as the guest of the god, being under the same taboos as the Nar of Narain, while special preparations are made to create a favourable environment in which he may perform his functions.
Three days before the date fixed for the remission of sins a member of the congregation goes to a certain forest a little distance from the shrine of the goddess. He belongs to a house whose ancestors were once the Thakurs or independent chieftains of the track and his taks can be performed only by a member of this family. Several villagers accompany him, but they have their camp separate from his, and while engaged on his appointed duty he has to live in strict seclusion immune from all possible sources of contamination. He stays in the forest for three nights, sleeping and eating alone and spending the greater portion of the day on the fashioning of four images of cedar wood, two representing sheep and the other two goats. He fells the deodar with his own hands and cuts the images out of the trunk. The carving occupies several days, for he must not eat food until he has finished the daily task. The images, however, are ready by the evening preceding the festival, and on the following morning he carries them, two on each shoulder, to the temple of the goddess, being met at a little distance therefrom by the band of musicians who escort him to the shrine. There he places them in the centre of the tabernacle where the diagonals of the sacred square intersect. This has been marked out previous to his arrival, the poles of the sacred tent having been cut an hour or two before with great ceremony. The cutting is entrusted to four or five subjects of the goddess especially appointed by her. These have fasted during the previous
day, have well washed their clothes and have performed ceremonial ablutions. At sunrise they come to the temple, where the diviners of the gods attending the festival and the general congregation have already assembled. The diviners are all in the state of religious ecstasy, and as their excitement is communicated to many of the onlookers, the village green is soon filled with men and women under the favour of the gods. A procession is formed, headed by the trumpeters and drummers followed insuccession by the minister of goddess, the diviners others under the afflatus and the sacred axe-men. The common people, to whom the goddess has not vouchasafed her favour, follow at some distance in the roar. The destination of the party is a forest about an arrow's shor away., and on the journey barley flour and mustard seed are scattered in the air so as to derive away any malevolent spirits which may have joined the party.

When the forest is reached, a cedar tree is selected and the minister (Pujari) of the goddess first ascends it, waving a conser of incense amidst the foliage. He is followed by the axe-men who carry with them a sheep which they sacrifice in the branches, dropping the carcase at once to the ground, so that the demons, ghosts and witches which are thronging round shall seize upon it and leave the tree without infection. They quickly cut four branches with their axes, but those they do not allow to fall, bringing them
carefully to the ground where they place them on their shoulders and the procession reforms. The whole assembly, throwing barley flour and leaves of the bokhal, proceeds to the village green where a scene of wild excitement takes place. The frenzy of those already possessed grows more violent, while others in the congregation became animated by the goddess. Some wave branches of bokhal, others brandish axes and swords while the medium of the devi herself "play" with two daggers, one in each hand. Four archers labouring under the afflatus are posted one at each corner of the green and loosen arrows towards the four quarters of the compass, so forming a barrang against those powers of evil which are not gorging on the slaughtered sheep. Finally the crowd reaches the shrine of the goddess where the Nar awaits them. Taking the four cedar branches, he places them with his own hands at the corners of the tabernacle which is then covered by cloth supplied by the god. A sacred square is marked out beneath the tent with medial an diagonal lines, heaps of grain and lamps being placed in the compartments while the wooden images, as already noted, are put at the intersection of the diagonal lines.

When the frenzy of those possessed has declined the Nar takes his seat just outside the tabernacle. The Naran dances about him and a few paces away the minister of a neighbouring god makes the burnt offering,
grain and fruits of various kinds, sacred grass, ghee and honey all being thrown into the fire. So the rites of absolution begin, and are conducted in the same way as at the Hurang Festival. They finish about moon when the people take their food and the Nar is given strong liquor to drink. Shortly, afterwards, he is taken inside the temple, being accompanied by the diviners of the gods who are now again in a state of possession. The medium of the goddess seats him on a low beard resting on the ground and after a minute or two he simulates death. The board is then taken up by four or five worshippers and carried round the village, after which it is laid on the square in front of the shrine. Further, "play" ensues, many of the large crowd, which numbers several thousand, showing the signs of divine inspirations, and after a little while the mediums sit down in a circle round the corpse. A goat is thrown across the prostrate body of the Nar and then sacrificed, a little blood being rubbed on the latter's mouth. The Naran, in the meantime, sings and dances around him. The diviner of the goddess waves a branch of bokhal round the Nar's head, while he and his colleagues pray to her to raise him from the dead. After some time he shows signs of returning life and the medium of the devi placing his hand behind his shoulder rises him slowly from the bier. As at Hurang, the resurrection of the Nar brings the festival to a close.
The third place in Mandi at which the Kaika is celebrated is the temple of Adhi-Purak, a god who lives at the village of Tihri, about three Kms. on the Mandi side of the Dulchi Pass. The name which literally means half man suggests that the god is a manifestation of Shiva in his aspect of half woman, but the peasants connect him with Adhi-Brahma who in Kullu also celebrates the Kaika. They were, so they say, once the subjects of the latter god, the territory now including the two temples being then under the same rule, but when Kullu was separated from Mandi they cut apart from Adhi-Brahma's worship, taking half of his image and founding a shrine to house it. But the truth of this legend is open to doubt. Tihri itself is a large and prosperous village well situated on moderately gentle slopes, with sunny aspect and fertile soil specially suited for the cultivation of barley. The temple is well above the village on a gentle slope with a few cedar trees scattered around. The courtyard is surrounded with buildings on three sides, that on the north being the inner sanctuary with a small cell which faces south and contains a linga of stone. In front of the temple is an open ward and on the west of it a small grass plot. To the east is the shrine of the God's Wazir who settles all matters too trivial to worry his master about, and whose shrine is therefore covered with scores of tridents offered to him as votive gifts.
The Kaika is held with fair regularity, the usual interval between successive celebrations being four years; but the people are sometimes unable to entertain the crowds who attend the festival so frequently as this and the period is then prolonged. The celebrations always begin on the first of Asauj, a day generally observed in the hills in thanks giving for the autumn harvest. The ritual is very similar to that already described; but the Nar sits beneath, and not outside, the tabernacle when he absolves the people, and he himself selects the cedar tree to be used in its erection. On the evening before the festival begins, he chooses four five men out of the subjects of the god to act as axe-men and taking them to a forest about half a kilometre from the temple he points to four small cedar poles which they then fell and carry to the temple. Very early in the morning, the Nar indicates the exact spot on the plot of ground to the west of the temple where the poles are to be planted, and the axe-men fix them in the ground. The service of absolution lasts for several days; for large crowds of people come in from various parts of the area to have their sins remitted, and the assembly contains not a few-non-agriculturists who usually take little part in rural festivals. During the whole of this time, the Nar is allowed fruit and milk only. He is either obtained from an adjacent Kothi of Kullu or from a Mandi village not far away, and he brings with him either his wife
or a female of the Nar clan. Before the remission of sins commences, he is taken inside the temple of the god from which he emerges in a state of possession, with the ark of the god beside him, the diviner playing and the Naran dancing and singing. While absolving his clients, he has in front of him a drum-shaped piece of wood about a metre high, which for some obscure reason is regarded as essential to the proper performance of the rites. As at Hurang, the god is first cleansed and then the members of the congregation. When the time comes for the Nar to die, he goes to the shrine and having stood before the image for a few minutes falls down as dead. His resurrection is affected in the same way as at the Kaika of Phungni Devi, a sacrificial victim being thrown across his body before immolation and its blood sprinkled on him.

Such are the rites of the Kaika in which is represented the three-fold mystery of the remission of sins the death and the resurrection. But the resemblance to the same cardinal features of the Christian faith is not so strong as would at first sight appear. In the first place, the remission of the sins at the Kaika involves a totally different train of ideas from that implied by the atonement and forgiveness of sins. The word used for the service of absolution is Chhidra derived, I believe, from a Sanskrit word meaning "release" or "freedom from". The term is thus used for
release from an oath, or purification from an infringement of caste rules or from ceremonial pollution, and is then employed in the sense of Chhua Kholna which means literally to open or remove contamination or taboo. In Kullu the release from an oath is a religious ceremony, the parties bound by it being rightly regarded as under taboo. The consent of the family god is obtained and a feast held at which the parties at enmity eat together, or a feast is given to which the disputants each contribute a goat and also give flour to the god's temple. Or, yet again, the parties go to the shrine of the local deity and there worship mother earth, the god being given some money and a goat, which is sacrificed and eaten at a sacramental feast. But in addition to the taboos imposed by the rules of caste and religion, or by a voluntary act, there is an endless variety of illusive and intangible influences which may affect a man's life. These are of a supernatural order and there is no single word in the English language which quite expresses their conception by the hillman. When conceived collectively he uses the word greh, meaning literally constellation, but popularly used in the sense of illstarred fortune, and it is from baneful forces of this character rather than from particular sins that the people seek absolution at the Kaika festival. The ritual is but a development on a large scale of the minor ceremonies of purification which are found in
several interesting forms in the hills.

Again, the resurrection of the Nar is clearly an incident introduced as a mitigation of human sacrifice. There is no doubt that originally he was slain. The festival is still known as the Narkan, or killing of the Nar, and in Kullu the diviner of the god still shoots him "with an arrows in the breast making him insensible and a rupee is put in his mouth". At Hurang a rite is performed which suggests that the worshippers joined in his murder, their participation being regarded as an act of merit which helped to free them from their sins. When the Nar is taken to the small shrine where he falls insensible before the image, a curious ceremony is performed in front of the main temple. A large leaf of bread is placed on end, and the diviners of the gods with other inspired numbers of the congregation shoot arrows at it until it falls, broken to pieces. To hit the leaf is regarded as a good omen for the marksman, who is then cleansed of his sins. Having regard to the mimic death of the Naras it still occurs in Kullu, there appears to be little doubt that at the temple of Narain the loaf now represents the former victim of ritual murder. In common with primitive people elsewhere, the hillmen believed that the removal of sins could best be effected by the appointment of a scape-goat and his subsequent death at their hands. His resurrection was an after-thought, a device wherewith the form of death was preserved without its inconvenience.
A few words may be said regarding the Naran. Was she also an object of sacrifice? Probably not, for there is nothing in the rites as now observed to suggest that formerly she was killed. She does not "die" with her companion, and while his corpse lies before the temple she continues to dance and sing. She does not lament his death and lamentation would be regarded as ill-omened. What then is the nature of the part she plays? For an answer we must go to Kullu to the temple of Jamlu of Mulana, a god who has preserved in his secluded glen many of the most primitive features of Himalayan religion. He also celebrates the Kaika and a feature of the festival is the dedication to him of a handmaiden of the Nar caste. "There may be more than one handmaid at the same time and though they are forbidden to marry they are under no vows of chastity. When they grew old they are replaced by younger girls. Each receives a gift of a complete set of valuable ornaments from the shrine. Their duties are to dance before the temple and to recite verses not always of a very pure character." The Naran is thus intended as the bride of the god and the nature of her office is still preserved in the title assigned to her. She is known as Sita, the wife of Rama Chandra, the great Hindu god and incarnation of Narain—an appellation which places her in the same class as the "brides, servants or slaves of the god", so common in Southern India.
As the Naran is the hand-maidan of the god, so the Nar is the servant of the god. He has always to wear his hair long in token of dedication, and though he ordinarily lives at his own home he has to attend the god at his festivals and to accompany him on his journeys. His title of Nar the small Narain suggests that he was conceived as an incarnation of the god and was slain as such. This, however, is uncertain and the people themselves will throw little light on the question, being naturally somewhat reluctant to discuss the inner mysteries of their festival.

Shand or Shant literally means peace and prosperity. Shant, the Mahayajna for peace performed in the upper Shimla hills, is more like a battle engagement complete with fire spiting guns, shimmering swords, dangra (battle axes) and lances carried by Khunds (Martial warriors) dancing in war-like frenzy). The scene is completed by martial music rendered by a traditional hill orchestra on the Nagara (semi-circular drum), Karnal (hornpipe) haransingha (Shaped hornpipe) etc.

Shanti, Bhunda and Bhoj have been aptly described as Kumbhas of the hill people. These are held after 12 years, or even later, after villagers have collected required cereals and funds. While Kumbha are held only at Hardwar and Paryag at fixed intervals, in the hills different deotas host Shands bu turn and there is Shand every five years or so in
one part or the other. Bhunda is a Hrahman Yajna. Shant is mainly managed by the Rajputs. 69

Bhoj is organised by Harijans. However, these festivals are symbolic of emotional integration and every villager dances and sings with fellow-villagers, irrespective of caste or creed.

A curious aspect of the Shand is that these are held in the month of Posh (December-January) when hills experience very heavy snow fall. Possible this month is choosen as farmers are free from farm operations during the period.

The deity in whose name the festival is being celebrated invites the neighbouring village gods and godlings. All the participating households invite their relatives to the festival. The visiting deities, their devotees and Khunds mostly Khasha people all stay in the open especially in the fields swon with barley and wheat. They are barred from sleeping under the roof. At the most, they may live in tents or under tarpanlins. The deities also camp in fields as it is a general belief that the deotas bless the fields on which they camp.

Possibily looking to the limited resources of the hosts, the inviting deotas and Khund bring with them tents, beddings, cooking utensils, hookas and all

things needed onroute or during the Shant. The host supply cereals, sugar, tea, ghee, fuelwood. They cook their food and sing and dance throughout day and night for three or four days.

During the Shand days the holy scriptures and mantras are recited within the temple to urge the gods to bless the devotees with peace and prosperity and warlike scenes are enacted in the courtyard of the temple to sacre away the evil spirit. Many sacrifices are made in the name of deities. The goat is taken round the temple and is sacrificed. Sheekhar (Cabled roof) Pujan ceremony is important one and is performed at the top of Shikhar (temple, is by far the most enthralling. The Brahmans and Rajputs get to the top of the temple. While the Brahmans carry dhoop honey, ghee, rice, sweets, fruits, flowers and other Puja requirements, the Rajputs carry guns and swords. Some clad in white, others smear their naked bodies with ashes. The offering of goats amidst happy and joyous cries provide the climax. Therefore, the image of the deity is brought out of temple and danced up and down in a palanquin. The dancing is indulged by both men and women. This is followed by feast at which relatives are entertained by each other. Meat and liquor are consumed. All visitors are welcomed and fed for three or four days.
Other minor shants are held every three years; and are called Shandtu or Tikar. Some are held on a small scale, and other are performed on the top of a hill instead of at the temple. When any repairs have been made to the temple a small Shand takes place, a few goats are sacrificed, and Brahmans fed.

BHOJ literally means community feast. It is extensively a festival of Koli community. This is arranged and managed by Koli people of the village at the temple of their deota (deity). Its main purpose is to worship their village gods in a grand scale. They invite neighbouring deotas of their community feast of 'eat, drink and merry.' The goddings and people of upper classes of other villages except the village where it is held, are neither invited nor do they take part in this celebration.

The purpose of holding this festival is to worship all the deities by offering sacrifices and pray them for good crops and seek protection from the natural calamities and evil spirits. It also strengthen the solidarity and friendish amongst the people of the community living at different places.


It also afford the opportunity to meet the distant relatives and olderly men of the community. Besides, it also provides entertainment to all young and old women and children.

The festival is not held at regular intervals as it is very expensive and people cannot afford it too often. It is held only when the people are sure that they have a good crop and are in a position to bear the expenses. Here the village deity plays an important part. He through his goor or Mali (oracle) forcastes that his Bhoj should be arranged for the next year. The Kardars of the temple hold meeting, draw out a programme, starts collecting funds. The Koli people make mutual contribution of cash, flour, oil, rice, wheat amongst themselves and get some help from the people of upper classes. This collection is deposited in the dota bhandar to meet the expenses of the ceremony.

Nearly six months before the Bhoj date the Kardars of the temple start grinding of wheat husking of rice and storing of pulses, oil, sugar, tabacco and procure goats for sacrifice. One month before the celebration the village deity through his goor gives the date for holding the festival. Invitation on behalf of village deity are sent to the neighbouring deities of the same community and their followers. There is no limit to the number of persons accompanying each deity. All the Koli inhabitants male, female and
children of the particular village can accompany their deota to the Bhoj. All of them are received as guests by the host deota and are provided food till the festival last.

This festival is generally held for three days. On the first day the host deota receives the deota and their followers who come dancing and singing. Next day the host deota is taken out in a palanquin and brought out in a temple court yard. Then the guest deota carried by their worshipper in palanquins are brought with the drum beat near the host deota to pay their respect to him. While doing so the oracles of the deotas are given barley flour which they turn by turn throw in the air in different directions meaning thereby to warding of evil spirits.

After paying their respect to the host deota the invited detas, their oracles come infront of the host deota's palanquin. The oracles hold iron pikes in their hand. They also bow before the host deota and become in trance. Then they pierce the iron through their checks and middle of noses. Some of them pierce through the check from inside the mouth and some through both the checks from one end to the other. It is said at by this act the village deota makes his power feel to the masses as the oracles feel no pains while inserting those needles. This is a bloodless pievcing. When all the oracles have inserted the needles they again bow before the host an guest deotas
and then dance to the accompaniment of musical instruments. At the end of this feast the guest deotas go to the temple for evening worship. The oracles take out needles from their checks and they come to their senses. Oracles and guests return to their respective camps which are pitched open in the fields.

After having their evening meals the people again come to the field and make bonfire. They sing and dance throughout night.

The next day all the deotas assemble in front of the host deotas' temple. Here their oracles again come into trance and pierce iron needles in the checks. Then the deotas along with oracles and procession take the round of the village. This procession is accompanied by musical band. The sacrifices are made to Agni and other deities at different places. The purpose of this round is that no evil spirit may be able to enter the village.

Pumpkins, pigs, cocks are sacrificed in the name of ghosts. After completing the round of the village the procession returns to the temple and thereafter a goat is sacrificed on the Shikhara of the temple of village deota. This goat is offered to the Kalis.

74. Ibid. P.92.
After this the oracles remove the iron needles from their cheeks and they come to their senses. Then the deotas are brought to the fields and rested their. The people dance and sing songs.

On the third day the deotas and their worshippers dance and sing till late in the afternoon. Then the invited deotas take leave from the village deota to return to their own village temples. While departing each deota is given some cash. With this the festival comes to an end and the visitors return to their homes.

NAWALA is a festival of Gaddi tribe inhabiting the valleys of Kangra, Chamba and some parts of Mandi and Kullu. This is celebrated individually at a time when a householder thinks it proper, but it is a must once in a life time.

Gaddis always invoke Shiva's help in misfortunes, ailments and for success in certain undertakings. While doing so, they undertake to perform His worship in case they succeed in their undertakings. The special prayer is called Nawala and may be offered at the time of the marriage, on the construction of a new house, recovery from illness, etc. This is a sort of thanks-giving service offered to their deity Shiva.  

According to a version, Nalwala is said to have been derived from the word Navmala meaning a new garland. During the performance of Nawala, Shiva is worshipped at night. Inside the house a square Mandala of rice flour is drawn in the centre of the room a Shivapindi is placed on it.

Also, heaps of wheat flour and pulses are made which denote the Kailash and other hills. Then an artistic garland of seasonal flowers is prepared and hung from a hook in the ceiling over the Pindi. A priest conducts the ceremony and a person performing the Nawala makes the offering and in some cases the sacrifice may be confined to a coconut only. Devotional songs dedicated to Shiva are sung throughout the night. These songs are called Ainchali.

The oracle is summoned who goes into a trance as soon as the sacrifices are offered to Shiva. He is said to be possessed of Lord himself. He answers questions put to him by member as the households and their friends present. This function lasts till the midnight and all other except the members of the household and their near relatives then depart. Next day a feast is given in which all friends and relatives are invited and the Nawala comes to an end.

76. Ibid. Chitrari, 1965, P.52.
CHHESHU:

Chheshu is a festival of the Lahaul Valley, and is celebrated in the monasteries. In the monasteries of Sha-Shur it is held in Jeth (June) and in the monastery of Gandola in Ashar (July). On the 10th of the waxing moon, people assemble there from neighbouring villages and the gathering is usually more than five hundred.

The celebration consists mainly of drinking during the day and dancing during the night. It has a religious aspect too and worship is performed in the morning. The lamas play a sort of miracle play or devil dance. The performers wear rich dresses of silk and the orchestra of drums and cymbola is led by the abbot of the monastery clad in his robes and mitre. The acting consists entirely of pantomime and dancing, except that a chorus is occasionally chanted. The victim of the numerous pranks played by devils and others in this ceremony is the King Longdarma of Central Tibet who was the arch enemy of Buddhism. The dance is said to owe its origin to Tibet and signifies a fight between good and evil.

The story behind this celebration is that Ralpa-Chen (817-36 AD) of Tibet was a king with deep religious conviction. He organised and increased the

existing priest hood, built temples and zealously extended Buddhism throughout the country. During his reign many Indian Buddhist teachers visited Tibet. His great devotion to Buddhism led to his murder at the instigation of Lang Darma, his younger brother who was at the head of anti-Buddhist party. After ascending his brother's throne, Lang Darma (836-42 AD) did every thing in his power to destroy the Buddhist faith. Many Buddhist fled to western Tibet. Lang Darma however, did not survive his success, for he was assassinated by Lama Palgyi in 842 A.D. To commemorate the victory over the evil the lamas enact the dance drama in the monastery by wearing masks. Those dances of lamas have been interpreted or misinterpreted in a number of ways. The dances generally wear masks indentifying them with personages belonging either to the Buddhist pantheon or to the history, legend and folklore of Tibet; most travellers, knowing next to nothing about Buddhism or Tibetan mythology, generally refer to the daces as "demon dance". This justifiably annoys the Tibetans for in fact the dances are a form of religious expression comparable in some ways to

Handa, O.C. Buddhist Monasteries in Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, 1987, p.60.
mediaeval mystery plays. Their themes are always either religious or historical—the temptation of Buddha by the legions of Mara, the triumph of Buddhism over the sorcerers, the miracles of Padma Sambhava and his struggle with the demons, the battle between the beneficient gods and the kings of Hell, or the murder of the Tibetan monarch Lang Darma, who persecuted Buddhism in the 9th century.

On Chheshu occasion Lamas and Jomos (nuns) perform Chheshu in the temples. This includes reading of religious books and offering prayers for the general welfare of the village and the good of the dead. For a regular performance of Chheshu small piece of land is gifted by the villagers to the monasteries. Delicious food is prepared and served to Lamas and Jomos. For this the villagers contribute in cash and kind to the temples.

DECHHANG:

This is restricted to Lahaul and Spiti district. In the Spiti area, it is an occasion for getting together about the first week of Magh (mid January), the peak of winter season. In some villages people

get together in a community hall for two or three days while in others they assemble in smaller groups in individual houses. The observance is taking drinks together, dancing and merry-making which lasts from two or three days to a week.

In the Lahaul area Dechhang is a religious function, observed towards the end of Chet (second week of April) to worship and propitiate Lord Buddha. Lamas are invited to households where they read from their religious books, known as Yum. To the accompaniment of damar, a musical instrument, bugjal, a pair of bronze dishes, and naga, a sort of drum. All villagers including women participate in the function. Tsagti (brewed from barley) is served to them. There is a lighter side of the function also in folk songs and dances performed at night by the men.

PHAGLI:

Pattan valley is much under the influence of Hindu religion as against the rest of Lahaul where lamaistic Buddhism prevails. As such the deities and divinities that come in for worship here also belong to the Hindu pantheon, though the rites and rituals connection with them has specially a local tinge, typically tribal.

Phagli is the biggest festival of the Pattan Valley. Phagli has more or less the same importance in Pattan valley what Shivratri has elsewhere in India though their dates of celebrations do not coincide. Phagli generally falls in the month of Phalgun (February).  

The festival starts at midnight. The snow is collected in a Kilta (conical shaped basked) and placed upside down on the roof of the house. The snow thus collected is given a shape of Shiva Linga which becomes the image of worship by all members of the family.

Besides Shiva, the other main deities which are objects of worship on the occasion are Naga and goddess Hidimba. Hidimba was a demon and was married to Bhima, one of the Pandava brothers. People generally believe that she was a goddess and belonged to their tribe. There is also a famous temple of Hidimba at Manali, the gate way of Lahaul.

Another feature of Phagli festival is the worship of the elders by younger generation.

---


PHAGUL OR SUSKAR:

Phagul festival is also known as Surkar. This festival is celebrated mostly in the month of Phalgun (February-March). In Nichar the date for this festival is announced by the goddess Usha, through her oracle, for the whole of Atharabeesh Pargana. In this festival the spirit of Kanda (Peaks) called Kali is mainly worshipped which lasts about a fortnight and is celebrated all over Kinnaur. Each day of the festival is called by a different name and several peculiar functions are held each day. On the last day a feast is prepared and people worship Kali on the roof of the house and then partake of the food. It is believed that if the function and festivities are celebrated with full zeal, Kali, the mother feels happy and blesses the villagers with prosperity and plenty in the coming year.

A description of the celebration of Phagul/Suskar festival is given here to give an idea of the gaiety of the people of the Kinnaur. It continues for about a fortnight.

1ST DAY-CHHATKERMIK:

Villager bring clay on this day for the cleaning of the houses.

2ND DAY-CHHALLIM:

The clay brought is mixed with cow-dung and it is plastered on the walls and floors of the house.

3RD DAY-RULPHANTING:

Rice and pulses are cooked together like Khichri and are given to Lohar or Gadh. The family also eat it.

4TH DAY-MARTELANG:

This day the villagers take ghee especially with the other food like chilte, rice, pulses etc. Next morning this food is also distributed among the scheduled castes.

5TH DAY-TIPRUCHIM:

On this day a Lohar from the Kothi goddess side goes to Koshmo village to divert the Kul coming to Kothi. Th main purpose is to stop the gharats. Spinning of wool, cutting of wood and construction of a house are prohibited during these days to welcome the Kali. On this evening Kali is supposd to reach the village. People take bath and the cooking place is basmeared with cow-dung. Temple of Kothi is also cleaned. Poltu (fried
cakes) and *ogla-halwa* are prepared in every house and these preparations are placed in a corner of the house near Kimshu. A lamp is lit near these and *dhoop* is burnt. Head of the household then comes after taking bath in *bowli* and without touching any once goes to the place of worship with a *lota* full of water. He would put some butter in the *ogla-halwa* and sprinkles some water on all the food. *Sanarang* flowers are placed in a platter in which *ogla halwa* is added. He then performs the *puja* with halwa, wine and *dhoop*. After this the *Sanarang* flowers are distributed in the family. In this *puja* and the household prays to the Kali that the coming year may pass with happiness, plenty prosperity and peace. Then they enjoy the food.

**6TH DAY TELEKAYANG:**

One Koli of Brelangi is sent to Kalpa fort on behalf of the Kothi goddess. He stays with charmarmathas, a worker of Kalpa god Naraianus and also takes his meals there. He goes to Chinecharus (a family in Kalpa) for bringing some new clothes (*Chhubba* and *Sutan*) for Krosya, the bearer of *Khandaji* (Sword). It is customary that Chinecharus will refuse twice and the third time he gives the cloths to the Koli called Tokanya. With these clothes he comes to the fort where he is served with *ogla halwa* called *Deo*, butter and wine. The Tokanya is thenceforward called *Daulco*. Thereafter
the mate of Kalpa god warns the villagers that Dauloo is about to come and they should hide themselves. This is done because the Dauloo is supposed to have been possessed by the Kali. The Dauloo then passes through the village and if any person in the village happens to be seen by him this is bad, omen. The villagers are, however, permitted to watch him through closed doors. He takes the clothes to Krosya (an attendant of Kothi Devi). Kalpa mate follows him with shothang (wine) and an interesting thing is that the mate should not overtake the Dauloo. So after leaving the village the Dauloo runs to the Krosya's house called Tholing lest he may be caught by the mate. The mate too reaches Tholing. The clothes are now put on the Krosya and he goes to the temple to bring Khandaji. Khandaji is the companion of Kothi Devi, who is said to have descended from Kailash to slay the demons. It is now represented by a sword wrapped in five silk clothes. After worshipping Khandaji in his house (tholing) the Krosya and the Dauloo take Khandaji to Telangi village in a party of about fifteen persons. This party is hereafter called Kaliyan. Khandaji is worshipped in Telangi temple and a fair is held there. The same night Khandaji is brought back to Tholing.

7TH DAY SHUMRAPA:

Khandaji is taken to Koshme-fort and there it is worshipped with halwa, poltu and wine. A fair is held
8TH DAY CHINEKAYANG:

The Kaliyan party with Khandaji come to Kalpa village where some earth is dug up & Khandaji rests there a while. Then this party enters the fort. A few persons from Kalpa Naraianus god keep the meals ready for the party. A lighted lamp is hung from the roof. Before serving the meals the members of the party wash their hands and the water called Songaletee is thrown out. When it is thrown out no person should watch it. Khandaji then goes to Santang, the compound in front of the temple and a fair is held on that day. On the same evening the party which Khandaji goes back. If any person happens to be seen by the Dauloo on the day, he has to worship Khandaji with a bottle of wine, flowers and some offering (called Bhent) of money as an atonement. Thereafter he is considered to have been absolved of his sin.

9TH DAY KHAWANGKAYANG:

Khandaji after reaching Kothi and the Kaliyan party after taking meals go to Khawangi village. It is said once a woman of Telangi who was married in Khawangi happened to meet the party on her way to Khawangi. She requested them to come to her village Telangi in her house instead of Khawangi. The party agreed and it was served with Chhach and Sattu. From that day onward the party goes to Telangi although it was meant for Khawangi.
In Telangi even now the party is served with Chhach and Sattu only on reaching there with Khandaji. The same evening they return to Tholing.

10TH DAY SHUKHUBSHIMIG:

On this day Khandaji is honourably retired to Shirkoth temple. A fair is held where people dance and drink. It may be mentioned here that during the tour of Khandaji the goddess does not accompany him. The Krosya also returns the clothes to chinecharus after the completion of these rituals.

11TH DAY SHUBIM:

On this day Kali, who was supposed to have descended on the 5th day; is given farewell from the house. A Lota of water and flowers are kept in every house from the 5th day. After worshipping the Kali, that lota is taken to some water spring and is emptied there. At the time of farewell poltus and kangni rice are prepared.

12TH DAY SHUNGSHONGA:

From the 6th to the 10th day an earthen pot called Hurich is kept in the temple in which gur syrup is added daily. This syrup is called shuthung and on the 12th day this is distributed among the villagers as
charanamrit. All the villagers eagerly collect near the temple to take their share of it. However, this is not taken by the women.

13TH DAY TARATHIN:

This is a day of mirth and enjoyment. A rope is tied across the water tank and young folk perform some rope tricks. Swangs (fancy dress) are also performed in which the men wear women ornaments and clothes and dance for the amusement of the gathering. Some men dance riding dummy horses and the like.

14TH DAY PAZA:

This is the final day in the chain of celebrations: But it is essential that this day fall either on Tuesday or on Saturday otherwise the festival has to be extended.

Special food is prepared by the people. Kangni rice and poltus, wine and dhoop are necessary items. Krosya goes to the roof of the house and there puja is performed to give farewell to Kali from the village. There everybody is served with meals but grokeh (oracles) does not take food in Krosya's house. The Goddess is brought out of the temple and a fair is held. It is believed that if these functions and festivals are celebrated with full zeal, the Kali feels happy and blesses the villagers with prosperity and plenty in the coming year. This marks the end of Suskar festival.